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## Abstract

This thesis examines Shelley's art of sensuous imagery, or poetics of sensibility. To elucidate Shelley's concept of sensibility which links his poetry to its ethical and aesthetic concerns, I combine close textual readings of Shelley's imagery of the senses with his intellectual and cultural inheritance from the 'Age of Sensibility' which encompasses 'moral philosophy' (ethics and aesthetics) and 'natural philosophy' (science).

Chapter I focuses on Shelley's notions of sensuous pleasure and sympathy. A *Defence of Poetry* is a pivotal text that expounds Shelley's aesthetic and ethical taste, exemplified by his concept of sympathy. Taking up this argument, Chapter II investigates Shelley's vegetarian politics in *Queen Mab*, rooted in what I call *(dis)gusto*, 'taste' in both its physical and aesthetic senses. Chapter III focuses on aural imagery in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc.' Exploring the interplay between motion and emotion reveals how aesthetics and psychology, in Shelley's lyrics, are associated with the vocalisation of poetic inspiration. Chapter IV considers the relation of sight to Shelley's notion of the fragmentary in two ekphrastic texts concerned with visual representation, 'The Coliseum' and 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, In the Florentine Gallery,' which illuminate Shelley's idea of a circulating and sympathetic power that unifies humans or subject with object, alongside a fragmentary imperative within these texts. Chapter V investigates Shelley's treatment of touch and Nature's economy in 'The Sensitive-Plant' by juxtaposing Shelley's poem with Erasmus Darwin's cyclical system of Nature known as 'organic happiness,' which is recognised only by sympathetic sensibility. Chapter VI considers the intermingled imagery of scent and sympathetic love in *Epipsychidion* in conjunction with Shelley's theory of nervous vibrations influenced by eighteenth-century psycho-physiological discourses, mediated through the imagery of Venus, whose duality embodies the interrelations between sensuous pleasure and ideal beauty in Shelley's poetics of sensibility.

**The Pleasure of the Senses:  
The Art of Sensation in Shelley's Poetics of Sensibility**

**by  
Itsuki Kitani**

**A Thesis Submitted to Durham University  
for the Degree of PhD in English Studies**

**March 2011**

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## Illustrations

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## Abbreviations

- CPPBS* Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2 vols. to date (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000- ).
- LPBS* Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964).
- MSJ* Mary, Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (1987; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995).
- MW* Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003).
- POS* Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest et. al., 3 vols. to date (London: Longman; Harlow: Pearson, 1989- ).
- PW* Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, corr. G. M. Matthews, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970).
- PWPBS* Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E. B. Murray, Corr. Ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
- SP* Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Prose; or The Trumpet of A Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark (1954; New York: New Amsterdam, 1988).
- SPP* Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts Criticism*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2002).

## Preface

The preface to the first collection of national Japanese poetry entitled *Kokin Wakashū* (905) starts with the following passage by Ki no Tsurayuki, poet and chief editor of this project:

Japanese poetry has the human heart as seed and myriads of words as leaves. It comes into being when men use the seen and the heard to give voice to feelings aroused by the innumerable events in their lives. The song of the warbler among the blossoms, the voice of the frog dwelling in the water—these teach us that every living creature sings. It is song that moves heaven and earth without effort, stirs emotions in the invisible spirits and gods, brings harmony to the relations between men and women, and calms the hearts of fierce warriors.<sup>1</sup>

The first line of this passage is not limited to Japanese poetry, as rich natural imagery of this kind recalls British Romantic poets, including Shelley, who was able to perceive something poetic in everything on earth. In *A Defence of Poetry* (1820), he identifies ‘a nightingale’ with a ‘Poet who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.’<sup>2</sup> Drawing on his aesthetic experience of the external world, Shelley produced numerous lyrics—‘myriads of words’—about natural objects, emotions, politics, and many other

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<sup>1</sup> Ki no Tsurayuki, Kana Preface, *Kokin Wakashū: The First Imperial Anthology of Japanese Poetry: With Tosa Nikki and Shinsen Waka*, trans. Helen Craig McCullough (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1985) 3.

<sup>2</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry, Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts Criticism*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2002) 516 (hereafter this edition is abbreviated as *SPP*). Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Shelley's poetry and prose are taken from this edition.

subjects. ‘Ode to the West Wind’ (1819) is, among other things, the quintessential lyric replete with exclamation marks and interjectory words, as is exemplified by the following tumultuous and almost desperate aspiration and declaration of Shelley’s poet-speaker :

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!  
And, by the incantation of this verse,  
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind! (63-67)

Shelley’s heart-felt words flee like those ‘withered leaves’ from his heart with the hopeful promise of seeding life, to engender and ‘quicken a new life.’ Shelley and Tsurayuki both figure the poet’s language as the dead ‘leaves’ and the ‘seeds’ that allow ‘the human heart’ new growth.

Such an enthusiastic style of poetry—as in *Epipsychidion*—has been called ‘rhapsodic’ by some commentators.<sup>3</sup> The word ‘rhapsodic’ is derived from ‘rhapsode’ or ‘rhapsodist,’ which *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Online edition) defines as ‘[a] reciter of epic poetry, esp. a person whose occupation was to recite the Homeric poems’ (‘rhapsodist’ 2a.). This meaning later turned into ‘a user of enthusiastic or effusive language’ (‘rhapsodist’ 3).<sup>4</sup> Susan Manning says that in the late eighteenth century,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (1971; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) 432, 450, 464; William Keach, *Shelley’s Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984) 3; Michael O’Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 133. For detailed discussions about Shelley as a rhapsodist, see William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957; London: Routledge, 1970) 412-31; and David Fekete, *A Rhapsody of Love and Spirituality* (New York: Algora, 2003) 203-222.

<sup>4</sup> The word ‘rhapsodist’ appears in Shelley’s English translation of Plato’s *Ion*. See Plato, *Ion*, trans. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Platonism of Shelley*, ed. James A. Notopoulos (Durham: Duke UP, 1949) 477. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of Shelley’s English translation

‘Sensibility was rhapsodic both in its tendency to disconnect utterance from logical sequence, and in its essentially ecstatic organization.’<sup>5</sup> My thesis explicates how such poetic principles operate in his sensibility and his treatment of sensuous and synaesthetic imagery across his poetry and within individual poems. Shelley’s poetic sensibility is viewed in the context of a complex of psycho-physiological notions about sensations, sympathy or sympathetic love. From this viewpoint, I examine Shelley’s poetics of sensibility and its relation to psycho-physiological sensation, sympathetic love and sensuous pleasure, through a close textual reading of Shelley’s sensuous imagery as well as through a historical reading of Shelley’s constant attention to intellectual history. Such a reading identifies possible sources of particular images or ideas that Shelley draws on for inspiration from eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century moral philosophy (especially ethics and aesthetics) and natural philosophy (science). The poetic principles of Shelley’s thought have been less well-explored in Shelley scholarship, so that my readings of Shelley’s poetry and prose through this concept of sensibility opens up a new critical terrain both in Shelley studies and in Romantic studies. My study especially illuminates hidden links between Shelley’s knowledge and late-eighteenth century literary modes, recognised today as the ‘Age of Sensibility,’ which valued sensibility and sentiment as the capacities that make possible the exercise of sympathy.

Chapter I formulates my concept of sensibility based on psycho-physiological

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of Plato are from this edition.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Manning, ‘Sensibility,’ *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1740-1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and John Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 88.

sensations that are intrinsically rooted in Shelley's poetics. After assessing the current critical milieu of Shelley scholarship, I reflect on the critical attention given to Shelley's treatment of emotion by twentieth-century literary critics, especially T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis. Using these ideas, I shed light on particular traits found in Shelley's poetic creation and its rhapsodically sensuous pleasure, making reference to *A Defence of Poetry*, a pivotal text that articulates his aesthetical and ethical sensibility, which includes some of his theories about the operations of sympathy. To delineate Shelley's unique ethical and aesthetical perspective on the concept of sympathy, I locate Shelley's poetry in the tradition of the 'Age of Sensibility,' a description equally applicable to the moral and natural philosophy of the time.

Chapter II builds upon these ideas and theories established in the first chapter. Shelley's early philosophical poem *Queen Mab* (1813), I suggest, is centred on Shelley's moral and aesthetic principle that demanded a balance between body and soul (mind), expressed through his vegetarianism. Shelley's note on the practice of vegetarianism, in particular, expounds how dangerous flesh-eating is for humans' mental and physical well-being. Meat-eating is represented as one of the causes of the social inequality that is maintained by the negative trinity of tyranny of politics, economics, and religion. According to Shelley, the practice of vegetarianism enhances the power of sensibility in a psycho-physiological sense, as well as increasing sympathy among all living things on earth. Focusing on the imagery of 'taste,' a word that must be understood in both its physical and aesthetic senses, I elucidate Shelley's

vegetarian gastro-politics, which, built on the opposition between *gusto* (taste) and *dis-gusto* (distaste), is the means by which he vocalises his own feelings of political and social discontent.

Taking up this notion of a connection between psycho-physiological sensation and the aesthetic, Chapter III further explores Shelley's notion of the aesthetic in poetic creation, or *poiesis*. I address how psycho-physiological sensation influences the sympathetic interaction between the human mind and natural objects in Shelley's depiction of aesthetic experience. I analyse the representation of a super-sensible 'Power' portrayed in Shelley's companion lyrics 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (1817) and 'Mont Blanc' (1817). Through different poetic treatments, each lyric focuses on the invisible and visible. Yet 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' correspond to one another in their use of aural and kinetic imagery, particularly of a supernatural voice that stirs the poet-speaker's mind in an epiphanic moment, his sudden recognition of the essence of beauty and the sublime. My interpretation focuses on the ways in which sensibility, as a faculty of body, *motion*, and mind, *emotion*, is stimulated and inspired by aesthetic and sublime experience in *poiesis*. I examine how aesthetics and psychology, in Shelley's lyrics, are re-associated with the vocalisation of poetic inspiration.

Chapter IV reads Shelley's two fragmentary ekphrastic texts on visual representations of art, 'The Coliseum' (1818) and 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, in the Florentine Gallery' (1819), both products of Shelley's Italian experience.

Shelley's specific mode of ekphrasis, within these works, enables us to illuminate the role of sight in his poetics of sensibility, especially the circulation of sympathetic love between humans or between subject and object. Shelley's poetic process within these fractured and fragmentary writings unveils two alternating modes between creative (composing) and destructive (de-composing) which have the potential to be unified by the virtue of sympathetic love.

As Chapter IV explores the circulation of sympathy through visible objects, Chapter V attends to the circulation of sympathy and happiness in Nature's economy operating beyond sensory perception in Shelley's 'The Sensitive-Plant' (1820). I show how Shelley reaches beyond merely the imagery of the physical sense of touch (as the sensitive plant folds its leaves when they are touched) to use the Sensitive-plant as a symbol of his concept of sympathetic love. For instance, Shelley's Sensitive-plant's production of love circulating across the whole garden is akin to the mechanism of photosynthesis that was discovered in the late eighteenth century. I also interpret this circulation of love as a part of Nature's economy on a larger scale, which suggests an affinity with Erasmus Darwin's concept of 'organic happiness,' a proto-type of today's ecological circulation of life. For both Shelley and Darwin, 'organic happiness' is perceived or sensed only by the power of sympathetic sensibility.

Sympathetic love and sensibility is central to my discussion in Chapter VI of Shelley's *Epipsychidion* (1821), a long love poem dedicated to Emilia Viviani, for whom Shelley felt great compassion and empathy. *Epipsychidion*, I argue, dramatically

exemplifies Shelley's poetics of sensibility, as the sensuous imagery of scent connects the narrator's sympathetic mind (soul) to eighteenth-century psycho-physiological discourses founded on the theories of Isaac Newton and David Hartley, through which the narrator portrays his ideal woman-figure identified with Emily as well as Venus, an embodiment of beauty. The representation of Venus is multilayered, including both the celestial (spiritual) Uranian and the earthly (sensuous) Pandemian, who reside in the planet Venus as its genii. Emily as an avatar of Venus is always depicted with the imagery of scent and light which is linked to the narrator's own recollection associated with vibrations of nerves. This trace of scent is revealing in many ways, as it illustrates Shelley's theory of sympathetic love based on nervous vibrations, and his endless aspiration towards his ideal beauty as seen in many of Shelley's other poems. The last chapter reveals that the essence of Shelley's art of sensation is in his creative ability to crystallise and refine his aesthetic experience and record such pleasurable moments of sensation in the form of poetry.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a resemblance between Stendhal's concept of 'crystallisation' discussed in his non-fiction *On Love* (*De l'amour*, 1822) and Shelley's version, see Peter Butter, *Shelley's Idols of the Cave* (1954; New York: Haskell, 1969) 11n2.



## Chapter I

### A Defence of Sensibility: An Introduction

Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring  
Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly goddess, sing!  
—Homer *The Iliad* Translated by Alexander Pope—

#### 1. Shelley, Sensibility, and the Critical Milieu of Romantic Studies

Over the last quarter century, Romantic studies have been increasingly interested in the epistemology of sensibility. More often than not, a cursory flick through recent reference books concerned with British literature of the late-eighteenth century or with Romanticism, will come across a chapter on sensibility or a related topic.<sup>1</sup>

There are two broad critical approaches used to explore the relationship between Romanticism and sensibility: one is an historical approach to given texts, and the other consists of formal readings of selected literary works. Recent historically informed studies of Romanticism by Alan Richardson, Noel Jackson, and Fiona L. Price, examine

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<sup>1</sup> See John Mullan, 'Sensibility and Literary Criticism,' *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, 9 vols., gen.ed. H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson, 1989-2005, 243-44; Jennifer Keith, 'Pre-Romanticism and the End of Eighteenth-Century Poetry,' *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, John E. Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 271-90 and 'Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility,' *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) 127-41; Susan Manning, 'Sensibility,' 96; Inger S. B. Brodey, 'On Pre-Romanticism or Sensibility: Defining Ambivalences,' *A Companion to European Romanticism*, ed. Ferber, Michael (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 10-28; and Ann Wierda Rowland, 'Sentimental Fiction,' *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. Richard Maxwell and Kate Trumpener (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 204.

the operations of mental and physical sensation in Romantic poetry.<sup>2</sup> These studies emerged after the flourishing of New Historicism between the 1980's and 1990's, which followed in the wake of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980).<sup>3</sup> Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) and Marjorie Levinson's 'The New Historicism: Back to the Future' (1986) contained in the collection, entitled *Rethinking Historicism* (1989), are the most influential Romantic New Historicist studies, and they established a symbiotic relationship with Marxist cultural materialism and Foucauldian discourse analysis.<sup>4</sup> Yet more recent studies by these critics, including McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility* (1996) and Levinson's 'What is New Formalism?' (2007), have focused increasingly on close formal reading as opposed to ideology.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Alan Richardson, 'Romanticism and the Body,' *Literature Compass* 1.1 (2004): 1-14 and *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) and *The Neural Sublime: Cognitive Theories and Romantic Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010); Noel Jackson, *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008); and Fiona L. Price, *Revolutions in Taste, 1773-1818: Women Writers and the Aesthetics of Romanticism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009). In comparison to Richardson's studies, Jackson's historical approach to Romantic authors has reflected the development of historical studies in Alain Corbin's 'history of the senses' and Michel Foucault's concept of the *episteme* (the system of knowledge shared among people in unconscious and invisible ways) since the late twentieth century (Jackson 64-66). The cultural historian George S. Rousseau is one of the earliest scholars to have incorporated Foucault's historical approach and the New Historicism into the study of eighteenth-century cultural history. See George S. Rousseau, *Enlightenment Crossings: Pre- and Post-modern Discourses: Anthropological* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1991) and *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004) 160-84, 215-40.

<sup>3</sup> The New Historicists differentiated their own method from traditional literary history, by interweaving a literary text into a broader mass of historical texts. Put differently, New Historicism blurred the distinction between text and context, between foreground and background. For a succinct summary of New Historicism which embraces post-colonialist and feminist historicism, see Paul Hamilton, *Historicism*, 2nd ed. (1996; London: Routledge, 2002) 115-75. For Greenblatt's own account of New Historicism, see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2000) esp. 1-19.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (1983; Chicago: Chicago UP, 1985) 3; and Marjorie Levinson, 'The New Historicism: Back to the Future,' *Rethinking Historicism: Critical Readings in Romantic History*, Marjorie Levinson, Marilyn Butler, Jerome McGann, Paul Hamilton, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) 18-63. See also Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (1996; Oxford:

This recent critical shift towards close textual analysis advocates paying attention to the formal, aesthetic, or affective properties of Romantic poetry.<sup>6</sup>

Surprisingly, with such a revival of formalism in Romantic studies, a close formal or aesthetic reading of Shelley's treatment of sensibility, emotions, or feelings, is still to be undertaken. To be sure, in the history of Shelley studies, there are those critics, such as Richard Harter Fogle and Glenn O'Malley, who have investigated Shelley's notion of sensation or sensibility by analysing synaesthetic imagery in Shelley's poetry, but their scope does not take into account historical context.<sup>7</sup> Yet Shelley's poetic ideas about the concept of sensibility are deeply influenced by the sensibility movement that emerged in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Sharon Ruston has recently examined Shelley's notion of sensibility from a scientific point of view, but her study focuses

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Oxford, 1998); and Marjorie Levinson, 'What is New Formalism?,' *PMLA* 122.2 (2007): 558-69. However, neither of these should be understood as expressing nostalgia for the age of New Criticism in the mid twentieth-century (McGann 8). Here I do not suggest that New Historicism and Marxist criticism have entirely ignored formal aspects of literary texts. In the 1980's Marxists and New Historicism recalled and emphasised the importance of extrinsic factors, rather than focusing on the intrinsic properties of texts. For example, see Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1974); and Alan Liu, 'The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism,' *ELH* 56.4 (1989): 721-71.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of recent formalist readings in Romantic studies, see Paul H. Fry, *A Defense of Poetry: Reflecting on the Occasion of Writing* (Stanford: Stanford, 1995) esp. 1-30; William Keach, "'Words are Things': Romantic Ideology and the Matter of Poetic Language," *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. George Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1994) 219-39; Susan J. Wolfson, "'Romantic Ideology' and the Values of Aesthetic Form," Levine, 188-218 and see also 'Romanticism and the Question of Poetic Form,' *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. John Beer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1996) 133-78; Mark Sandy, *Poetics of Self and Form in Keats and Shelley: Nietzschean Subjectivity and Genre* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) esp. 5-6; Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Language and Form,' *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, ed. Timothy Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2006) 145-65; Alan Rawes, ed. *Romanticism and Form* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); Michael O'Neill, 'Mournful Ditties and Merry Measures: Feeling and Form in the Romantic Short Lyric and Song,' *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. Charles Mahoney (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 9-24 (esp.9); and Anne-Lise François, "'The Feel of Not to Feel It," or the Pleasures of Enduring Form,' Mahoney, 445-66 (esp.454-55).

<sup>7</sup> See Richard Harter Fogle, *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley: A Comparative Study* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1949); and Glenn O'Malley, *Shelley and Synaesthesia* ([Evanston]: Northwestern UP, 1964).

more on the historical milieu of Shelley than on the precise analysis of imagery in Shelley's poems.<sup>8</sup> Both to fill that critical gap and to contribute to an analysis of Shelley's concept of sensibility, my thesis explores the relations between Shelley's poetics of sensibility and the epistemology of eighteenth-century sciences. It should be noted that eighteenth-century sciences were divided into natural philosophy and moral philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

My approach is modelled on an emergent new mode of Romantic studies which combines an historical approach with close reading, as exhibited in studies by Susan J. Wolfson, James Chandler, Denise Gigante and others.<sup>10</sup> The word 'aesthetics' etymologically signifies the study of *aisthesis* (sensation). This etymological origin of the word 'aesthetics' suggests that historical study of Romantic sensibility and aesthetic formal reading of Romantic poetry cannot and should not be mutually exclusive from one another, but must co-exist and complement one another. This juxtaposition opens up a new approach to the aesthetic aspect of Romantic literature. In this sense, as John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas write in their preface to *The New Aestheticism* (2003),

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<sup>8</sup> Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005). Rousseau's *Nervous Acts* has established the relationship between body and mind in the eighteenth century discourse of sensibility. Yet even in Rousseau's work, Shelley's notion of sensibility has remained untouched.

<sup>9</sup> In my study, the term 'natural philosophy' should be differentiated from *Naturphilosophie* as the philosophical tradition of German Idealism. With regard to moral philosophy, Timothy Clark also locates Shelley's 'science of mind' in the eighteenth-century tradition of sensibility. My study complements Clark's critical attention to Shelley's concept of sensibility, by making use of close textual reading. Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988) 13-64.

<sup>10</sup> Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997); James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998); and Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009).

aesthetic aspects of poetry should not be reduced to ‘discursive analysis’ nor to ‘the consolation of art construed as a mere “escape” from reality.’<sup>11</sup> By analysing Shelley’s use of sensuous imagery and rhapsodic form, my thesis illuminates the characteristics of Shelley’s art of poetic sensation in connection with a broader awareness of intellectual history comprising natural and moral philosophy. Such a conception of intellectual history reflects Shelley’s unique idea of the reader’s reception of his poetry in aesthetic, ethical, and political terms. To elucidate this point further, in what follows I situate my argument within the wider field of Shelley studies by re-examining those formal readings conducted by critics in the first-half of the twentieth century.

## 2. Shelley the Sensational Poet

### The Poet of Feeling and the Dissociation of Sensibility

In the first half of the twentieth century, an enthusiasm for Shelley was designated ‘an

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<sup>11</sup> John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas, ‘The New Aestheticism: an Introduction,’ *The New Aestheticism*, ed. John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003), 12. This comment is not incompatible with what Alan Liu says: ‘If literature, whatever its eventual medium, is to carry forward, it must speak not just for its time but for what is silent in its time and so only hearable—even if just as ghostly form—as history or future.’ Alan Liu, ‘Preface: “A Poem Should be Equal To: / Not True,”’ *Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on an Orthodoxy*, ed. Damian Walford Davies (New York: Routledge, 2009) xix. Another approach to the aesthetic aspect of Romanticism different from New Criticism or New Historicism may be found in de Manian deconstruction. See Paul de Man *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984) and *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1996). De Man’s conception of the aesthetic concerned with literary studies and literary history has been taken up and explored in recent Romantic studies, see Tom Cohen, Barbara Cohen, J Hillis Miller, and Andrzej Warminski eds. *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2001); Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the ‘Death of Subject’* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001); Marc Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003) and ‘Romantic Poetry and Literary Theory: The Case of “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal,”’ Mahoney, 467-82; and Marc Redfield ed. *Legacies of Paul de Man* (New York: Fordham, 2007).

affair of adolescence' by T. S. Eliot in his critical remarks in 'Shelley and Keats.'<sup>12</sup> In fairness at times, Eliot did temper his harsh judgement of Shelley's poetic sensibility, adding that 'Shelley seems to have had to a high degree the unusual faculty of passionate apprehension of abstract ideas' (89). In 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921), Eliot identifies what he terms the 'dissociation of sensibility' to account for the fact (since the period of Milton and Dryden) that as '[poetic] language became more refined, the feeling [or sensibility] became more crude.'<sup>13</sup> Here Eliot champions Shelley, Keats and their followers as those poets who tried to recover that lost sensibility: 'In one or two passages of Shelley's *Triumph of Life*, in the second *Hyperion*, there are traces of a struggle toward unification of sensibility. But Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated' (288).<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt that Eliot's conception of 'dissociation of sensibility' and his harsher judgements about Shelley's poetry exerted a considerable influence on F. R. Leavis's critical views of the poet. Following in Eliot's footsteps, Leavis writes of Shelley's 'weak grasp upon the actual.'<sup>15</sup> However, there are moments when, in spite

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<sup>12</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Shelley and Keats,' *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (1933; London: Faber, 1964) 89.

<sup>13</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets,' *Selected Essays* (London: Farber, 1951) 288.

<sup>14</sup> For recent studies of Shelley's influence on Tennyson's enthusiastic mode, see Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 237-50; and Mark Sandy, "'Echoes of that Voice": Romantic Resonances in Victorian Poetic Birdsong,' *Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era*, ed. Andrew Radford and Mark Sandy (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) 160-62.

<sup>15</sup> F. R. Leavis, 'Shelley,' *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (1936; London: Penguin, 1978) 194. For Eliot's ambivalent reaction—antipathy and affinity—to British Romantic poets including Shelley in his own poetic creation, especially from the perspective of Romantic studies, see Michael O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American, and Irish Poetry since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 60-82.

of his notorious censures against Shelley's poetry, that Leavis persuasively articulates something of Shelley's poetic and emotional sensibility:

Shelley, at his best and worst, offers the emotion in itself, unattached, in the void. 'In itself' 'for itself'—it is an easy shift to the pejorative implications of 'for its own sake'; just as, for a poet with the habit of sensibility and expression described, it was an easy shift to deserving them. ('Shelley' 201)

Leavis elaborates further on these emotional aspects and qualities of Shelley's poetry in the following manner:

The poetry in which Shelley's genius manifests itself characteristically, and for which he has his place in the English tradition, is much more closely related to his weakness. [...] The sensibility expressed in the *Ode to the West Wind* is much more disablingly limited than current valuation allows, but the consummate expression is rightly treasured.'

('Shelley' 215).

These passages illuminate an important point, in Leavis's view, about how 'Shelley's emotionalism' is tightly combined with an enthusiasm and passion that often impelled him to aspire to visionary and imaginative heights, as exhibited in the 'Ode to the West Wind.' For Leavis, this poem shows 'Shelley's genius at its best' ('Shelley' 200).<sup>16</sup>

This evaluation of Shelley by Eliot and Leavis, after all, shaped what was established as the stereotypical image of Shelley as an emotional, idealistic (or rather unrealistic) and immature poet, epitomised in Matthew Arnold's earlier description of Shelley as 'a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in

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<sup>16</sup> In response to René Wellek's criticism of *Revaluations*, Leavis states that he never 'attack[s] the *Ode to the West Wind*,' but 'merely illustrate from it the characteristic working of Shelley's poetry.' F. R. Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (1962; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) 220.

vain.<sup>17</sup> Richard Harter Fogle points to the strength of Shelley's poetry as residing in its exquisite depiction of nature: 'He [Shelley] projects himself into the object intellectually and emotionally but not physically; he has too little sense of the human body to be able to do so' (*The Imagery of Keats and Shelley* 177). Indeed, the relationship between sensation and Keats's imagery has been discussed by critics more often than in relation to Shelley's own poetic language. Given that Keats underwent medical training to become an apothecary, this critical divide might seem natural.<sup>18</sup> Keats, indeed, writes in a letter (22 November 1817): 'O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts.'<sup>19</sup>

Although Shelley's poetic imagery is, as Fogle believed, more abstract than that in Keats's poetry, Shelley's depiction of physical sensation in his poetry—and surely his prose too—is just as intense as Keats's treatment of the senses. This point will be illustrated by re-examining some lines from the 'Ode to the West Wind' such as 'old

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'Shelley,' *Complete Prose Works*, ed. R. H. Super, vol. 11 (1977; Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1990) 313. As Herbert Read's 'In Defence of Shelley' points out, this negative image of Shelley was also fashioned and fixed by widespread prejudice among 'those who disliked Shelley for literary, biographical, or ideological reasons.' Herbert Read, 'In Defence of Shelley,' *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry* (London: Farber, 1953) 212-13. See also Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 'Shelley's Reputation before 1960: A Sketch,' *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts Criticism*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2002) 546.

<sup>18</sup> For Keats's development of his intellectual or poetic sensibility, see William Walsh, *The Use of Poetry: Educational Thought and the Literary Mind* (London: Chatto, 1959) 86-120 and *Introduction to Keats* (London: Methuen, 1981) 62-83; and Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (1973; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994) 3-11. For Keats as a poet physician, see Alan Richardson, 'Keats and Romantic Science,' *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001) 230-45; and James Robert Allard, *Romanticism, Medicine, and the Poet's Body* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 87-110. For Keats's awareness of his own illness, in relation to the representation of Keats as a 'consumptive' poet, see Clark Lawlor, *Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006) 130-52. With regard to Keats and the medical discourses at work in Keats' poetry, see Hermione de Almeida, *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> John Keats, *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant F. Scott [based on the Texts of Hyder Edward Rollins], rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002) 54.



palaces and towers [...] / All overgrown with azure moss and flowers / So sweet, the sense faints picturing them!' (33, 35-36) and 'Oh! Lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud! / I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!' (53-54). The poet-speaker's delicate 'sense[s]' and psychological sensibility to enjoy the subtle beauty of the phenomenal world are interwoven into, and through, the imagery of 'bleed[ing]'.<sup>20</sup> Here the poet-speaker's heart bleeds due both to his desperation and aspiration. The phrase 'I bleed!' evinces the typical characterisation of Shelley's imagery of sensation intertwined with his physical and mental sensibility.

This also potentially dramatises what Eliot calls 'a struggle towards unification of sensibility' to stave off 'the dissociation of sensibility.' Shelley's awareness of, and poetic struggle with, this 'unification of sensibility' is further illustrated by the critical postures of later literary critics in manners distinct from, but indebted to Eliot's own.<sup>21</sup> Frederick A. Pottle has explained the influence exerted on Shelley studies of what he calls 'modern criticism' including that of Leavis and the New Criticism:

Modern criticism maintains that by these standards Shelley is a bad poet. He is sentimental: that is, he calls for a greater display of emotion than the modern reader feels to be warranted by the occasion. He employs pronounced, intoxicating, hypnotic rhythms that seem to be trying to

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<sup>20</sup> For a comparative reading of Keats's 'To Autumn' and Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' see Paul H. Fry, *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980) 203-17, 258-74. For a close reading of Shelley's 'Ode' with respect to his political thought, see Chandler, *England in 1819* 525-55.

<sup>21</sup> Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson, 2nd ed. (1950; London: Oxford UP, 1970) xxi, 9-16. William Empson, 'Sense and Sensibility,' *The Structure of Complex Words* (1951; London: Hogarth, 1985) 250-69; Allen Tate, 'The Angelic Imagination: Poe and the Power of Words,' *The Kenyon Review* 14.3 (1952): 464; and Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* [With a New Epilogue by the Author] (1957; London: Routledge, 2002) 164-91.

sweep the reader into hasty emotional commitments.<sup>22</sup>

Although Leavis and Eliot, as we have seen, never fully credit Shelley's genius, Pottle's remark usefully points to the centrality of the aesthetics of emotion in Shelley's poetry:

He exhibits dissociation of sensibility: though he is even too much aware of the disgusting, the ugly, the painful, and the horrible, he puts all the beauty into one poem and all the ugliness into another, or he sorts them out in different portions of the same poem. He luxuriates in emotion.

(Pottle 601)

Pottle's use of Eliot's term 'dissociation of sensibility' is prompted by Shelley's emotional treatment of 'ugliness' and 'beauty' in his poetry. For my own purpose, Raymond Williams pertinently defines Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility' as 'a presupposed disjunction between "thought" and "feeling."'”<sup>23</sup> For Williams, sensibility equates to 'a whole activity, a whole way of perceiving and responding, not to be reduced to either "thought" or "feeling"' (282). In this sense, sensibility necessarily includes aesthetic experiences of both 'beauty' and 'ugliness.'

### **The Principles of Pleasure and Sympathy in Shelley's Poetics**

For Shelley, however, poetry invariably involves the 'pleasure' of aesthetic experience. In *A Defence of Poetry* (1820), Shelley writes of the necessary relationship between poetry and pleasure:

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. We are aware of evanescent visitations of thought and feeling

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick A. Pottle, 'The Case of Shelley,' *PMLA* 67.5 (1952): 601.

<sup>23</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (1983; London: Fontana, 1988) 282.

sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression: so that even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in the nature of its object. It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over a sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only as on the wrinkled sand which paves it. (*SPP* 532)

Like Williams after him, Shelley's poetics of sensibility accommodates 'thought' and 'feeling,' which are conceptualised as 'evanescent visitations,' linked not to the human 'mind alone,' but also to the 'place or person' experienced by the observing subject. Shelley's poetics of sensibility constitute a form of experience, especially of 'the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.' Intriguingly, Shelley compares such moments with the 'footsteps' imprinted on the 'wrinkled sand' which, suggestively, implies the evanescence of all aesthetic moments.

Shelley's poetics of sensibility, mediated through 'thought' and 'feeling,' are enhanced by the power of the imagination. For Shelley, such enthusiastic experiences happen to 'those of the most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination; and the state of mind produced by them is at war with every base desire' (*SPP* 532). The 'most delicate sensibility and the most enlarged imagination' enable the poet to experience the world of poetry as if it were vivid reality:

The enthusiasm of virtue, love, patriotism, and friendship is essentially linked with these emotions [the 'sensibility' and 'imagination']; and whilst they last, self appears as what it is, an atom to a Universe. Poets are not only subject to these experiences as spirits of the most refined

organization, but they can colour all that they combine with the evanescent hues of this ethereal world; a word, a trait in the representation of a scene or a passion, will touch the enchanted chord, and reanimate, in those who have ever experienced these emotions, the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past. (*SPP* 532)

From these poetic ‘visitations’ the poet fixes on ‘a word, a trait in the representation of a scene or a passion.’ For Shelley, poetry results from a friction between imagination and sensibility comprised of ‘thought’ and ‘feeling.’ The rhapsodic mode of poetry ‘will touch the enchanted chord’ in the poet’s heart and will ‘reanimate’ remembrance of things past (*SPP* 532).<sup>24</sup> In this way, the poet can experience a recreated world through the power of poetic imagination and sensibility.

This physical metaphor for the effect of poetry on its audience connects the human heart with the pulses. That is to say, Shelley’s poetics of sensibility depicts poets as exerting the communicative or sympathetic power that resides in *poiesis* to stimulate the psycho-physiological sensations of their audience. Shelley says that ‘Poetry is ever accompanied with pleasure: all spirits on which it falls, open themselves to receive the wisdom which is mingled with its delight’ (*SPP* 516). Shelley adds that this poetic pleasure engages ‘the sentiment of the auditors’ by virtue of ‘a sympathy with such great and lovely impersonations, until they identify themselves with the objects of their admiration’ (*SPP* 516). This imaginative sympathy is linked to what Shelley calls the ‘social sympathies’ among humans:

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<sup>24</sup> For Shelley and the power of sympathy in human communication, see Roy R. Male, ‘Shelley and the Doctrine of Sympathy,’ *University of Texas Studies in English* 29 (1950): 183-203; and Teddi Chichester Bonca, *Shelley's Mirrors of Love: Narcissism, Sacrifice, and Sorority* (Albany: SUNY, 1999) esp. 125-96.

The social sympathies, or those laws from which as from its elements society results, begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings coexist; [...] and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action, inasmuch as he is social; and constitute pleasure in sensation, virtue in sentiment, beauty in art, truth in reasoning, and love in the intercourse of kind. (*SPP* 511)<sup>25</sup>

In Shelley's poetics, 'sensation' and 'sentiment' compose the 'pleasure' of poetry as verbal 'art.' It is also essential to understand that Shelley's association of 'virtue' with 'sentiment'—as well as 'pleasure' with 'sensation'—equates with the power of sympathy between 'two human beings.'

Shelley's emphasis on moral sentiment which is rooted in the 'social sympathies' is pertinent to the origins of *A Defence of Poetry*, initially, written as a response to Thomas Love Peacock's *Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), a satirical essay on the contemporaneous situation of poetry. Peacock disparages the poetry of his time as not 'ethical,' but rather consisting of 'egotistical rhapsodies, to express the writer's high dissatisfaction with the world and every thing in it.'<sup>26</sup> In such a mode, poetry 'serves only to confirm what has been said of the semi-barbarous character of poets' with

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<sup>25</sup> Wasserman has also drawn attention to the psycho-physiological character of Shelley's poetics (*Shelley* 209). Timothy Webb has also drawn attention to Shelley's enthusiastic joy in terms of the Greek tradition. See Timothy Webb, 'Shelley and the Religion of Joy,' *Studies in Romanticism* 15.3 (1976): 357-82. Webb has also drawn attention to the animation of mind caused by poetic joy. See Timothy Webb, *Shelley: A Voice not Understood* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977) 230-60. In the recent scholarship of Shelley, Jasper Cragwall discusses enthusiasm in Shelley's poetry in the context of religious enthusiasm, especially as manifested in Methodism. Jasper Cragwall, 'The Shelleys' Enthusiasm,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68.4 (2005): 631-53.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, 'Four Ages of Poetry,' *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. H.F.B. Brett-Smith and C.E. Jones, vol. 4 (London: Constable, 1934) 23.

‘sentiment, which is canting egotism in the mask of refined feeling; passion, which is the commotion of a weak and selfish mind’ (23).

Shelley’s emphasis on feelings and ‘sensibility’ is equally telling about the ethos of his time, as well as his own poetics of sensibility and the virtue of rhapsodic emotions to create poetry.<sup>27</sup> The preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) admits that Shelley’s poetry is to some extent indebted to his contemporaries: ‘One word is due in candour to the degree in which the study of contemporary writings may have tinged my composition, for such has been a topic of censure with regard to poems far more popular, and indeed more deservedly popular, than mine’ (*SPP* 207). In this sense, for Shelley, ‘Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape’ (*SPP* 207-08). Shelley’s poetics of sensibility, through the power of imagination, sensation, and sympathy, are also influenced by eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century discourses of sentiment and passion from which Peacock dissented. Understanding the movement of sensibility in the eighteenth-century illuminates some of the similarities and differences between previous arguments about taste and the senses and Shelley’s own poetics of sensibility.

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<sup>27</sup> Shelley’s poetics deployed in *A Defence of Poetry*, Wasserman says, describe the world-view based on ‘beautiful idealism’ rather than sceptic and pessimistic view of ‘sad reality’ (*Shelley* 220).

### 3. The Interaction of Eighteenth-Century Natural Philosophy and Moral Philosophy in the History of Sensibility

#### Sentimental Fiction in the Age of Sensibility

Acute sensibility and rhapsodic emotions are not unique to Shelley's poetry. Imagery, which expresses physical, kinaesthetic, and emotional impulses, can be found with frequency amid the long history of British literature including—according to Shelley—‘the translators of the Bible [e.g. *The Book of Job*, *The Book of Psalms*, and *The Song of Solomon*], Shakespeare, Spenser, the Dramatists of the reign of Elizabeth.’<sup>28</sup> In the age of Romanticism, however, emotive conceptions such as sensibility, sensitivity, sentiment, emotion, and feeling, were even more intensely scrutinised than in former periods of British culture.<sup>29</sup> This is expressed in one of the best known poetic manifestos of this period, in which Wordsworth defines poetry as a ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling’ in his preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1802).<sup>30</sup> Wordsworth elaborates in the following passage: ‘Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought

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<sup>28</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface, *Laon and Cythna*, ed. Jack Donovan, *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. Kelvin Everest and G. H. Matthews et.al. (Harlow: Pearson, 2000) 41, vol. 2 of 3 vols., 1989- to date (hereafter this collection is abbreviated as *POS*). Janet Todd, like Shelley, sees the ‘sentimental impulse’ or ‘[p]athetic and sensationally moving elements’ in the dramas written by Shakespeare, the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. See Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986) 3.

<sup>29</sup> For more details about the transition of the epistemology of emotion and passion from the eighteenth century to Romanticism, see Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> William Wordsworth, Preface (1802 version), *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed. (1991; London: Routledge, 2005) 291. Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* seems to be influenced by this preface: ‘A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight’ (528).

long and deeply' (Preface 291). Wordsworth then describes the poet as an embodiment of an extraordinary 'sensibility':

What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him? He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind, a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him [...]. (Preface 300).

Wordsworth's formulation of the poet, replete with 'lively sensibility,' indicates the extent to which the ideas of 'sentiment' and 'sensibility' were central concepts for late eighteenth-century poets, as well as pointing to a vital connection between the treatment of the senses and sensibility in the poetics of Wordsworth who survived both Romanticism and pre-Romanticism.<sup>31</sup>

Northrop Frye introduces the term, 'Age of Sensibility,' to divide the second half of the eighteenth-century into the 'Augustan' and 'Romantic' age.<sup>32</sup> The formation of the 'Age of Sensibility' in eighteenth-century Britain, conjoined with the rise of sentimental fictions, one of its most pre-eminent literary modes reached a peak around

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<sup>31</sup> Here 'pre' indicates 'proto' or 'before' the age of Romanticism. For details of Pre-Romanticism, see Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991) 82-112; Keith, 'Pre-Romanticism and the End of Eighteenth-Century Poetry' 271-90 and 'Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility' 127-41; and Brodey, 10-28.

<sup>32</sup> Northrop Frye, 'Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility,' *ELH* 23.2 (1956):144. See also Northrop Frye, 'Varieties of Eighteenth-Century Sensibility,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24.2 (1990-91): 157-72. For similar approaches to the late eighteenth-century literature, see also Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom eds., *From Sensibility to Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1965); and Harold Bloom ed. *Poets on Sensibility and the Sublime* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986). Incidentally, Eliot anticipates Frye's notion of the 'Age of Sensibility' by employing the similar phrase 'sentimental age,' which 'began early in the eighteenth century, and continued. The poets revolted against the ratiocinative, the descriptive; they thought and felt by fits, unbalanced; they reflected' ('The Metaphysical Poets' 288).



the 1770's with writers such as Goldsmith, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Frances Burney, and others.<sup>33</sup> The history of sentimental fiction can be traced back to Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady* (1747-48), or even further back to Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688).<sup>34</sup> Influenced by Richardson's *Pamela*, Jean-Jaques Rousseau wrote *Julie, or the New Heloise* (*Julie: ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761).<sup>35</sup> *Julie* then nurtured British sentimental novels such as Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), *The Man of the World* (1773), and *Julia de Roubigné* (1777) as well as Helen Maria Williams's *Julia: A Novel* (1790). Mackenzie inspired William Godwin's *Fleetwood: Or, the New Man of Feeling* (1805).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Keymer, 'Sentimental Fiction: Ethics, Social Critique and Philanthropy,' *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2005) 573; and Rowland, 191-206. For Sheridan's impact on British culture of sensibility, see Paul Goring, *Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 91-141.

<sup>34</sup> As Jennifer Keith says, recent scholarship regards late seventeenth-century poetry—around the age of John Locke and before Alexander Pope—as the cradle of 'the poetry of sentiment or sensibility' ('Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility' 129). For a genealogy of the man of feeling since the seventeenth-century, see R. S. Crane, 'Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the Man of Feeling,' *The Idea of the Humanities and Other Essays Critical and Historical*, vol. 1 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1967) 188-213. Richardson's impact lasted until the period of Victorian novelists like Dickens. See Fred Kaplan, *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 29-32. Michael Bell further extends his scope from Victorian literature to twentieth-century literature. Michael Bell, *The Sentiment of Reality: Truth of Feeling in the European Novel* (London: G. Allen, 1983) and 'The Cult of Sentiment and the Culture of Feeling,' *Representations of Emotions*, ed. Jürgen Schlaeger and Gesa Stedman (Tübingen: Gunter, 1999) 87-98 and *Sentimentalism, Ethics, and the Culture of Feeling* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000). Andrew Gibson addresses the idea of sensibility among modernists such as Jean Rhys and Djuna Barnes. See Andrew Gibson, *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel: From Leavis to Levinas* (1999; London: Routledge, 2001) 161-85.

<sup>35</sup> Rousseau's novel modelled on the legendary couple was already preceded by Alexander Pope's poem 'Eloisa and Abelard' (1717), which also shows a particular kind of sentimentality. In France, Denis Diderot also published sentimental novels. See Bell, *The Sentiment of Reality* 63-91; Mullan, 'Sensibility and Literary Criticism' 243-44. For another account of Diderot and sensibility, see Louis Bredvold, *The Natural History of Sensibility* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1962) 29-49; Bell, *The Sentiment of Reality*; 63-91; and John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 18-56, 201-40.

<sup>36</sup> See R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974) 243-67. For another example of the reception of Rousseau

Rousseau's *Julie* also had an influence on *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley—Godwin's daughter—via Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of the Young Werther* (1787). As Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was influenced by *The Man of Feeling*, so Shelley, who had been an avid reader of Rousseau and Godwin, was arguably a nineteenth-century self-styled 'Man of Feeling.'<sup>37</sup>

This literary movement of sensibility or feeling is encapsulated by Hannah More's epistolary poem 'Sensibility: A Poetical Epistle to the Hon. Mrs Boscawen,' which was added to her *Sacred Dramas* (1782). The movement was also represented by an array of poets and authors including Samuel Richardson, Henry Mackenzie, Lawrence Sterne, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, William Hayley, and Thomas Gray.<sup>38</sup> More also associates sensibility with 'sympathy' and other virtues:

Yet, while hail the sympathy divine,  
Which makes, oh man, the wants of others thine;

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in the age of Romanticism, see William Hazlitt's essay 'Of the Character of Rousseau.' William Hazlitt, 'Of the Character of Rousseau,' *The Round Table, The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, , vol. 4 of 21 vols (London: Dent, 1930) 88-93. [founding ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover]. All quotations of Hazlitt's works are taken from this collection.

<sup>37</sup> Shelley was reading *Fleetwood* and ordered a copy from a seller in 1812. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964) 260, 287, 345 (hereafter this correction abbreviated as *LPBS*). See also Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest, Headnote, *Alastor*, *POS* 1:458-59; Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution* 47; Bonca 83; and Jack Donovan, 'Laon and the Hermit: Connection and Succession,' *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 98-100.

<sup>38</sup> Hannah More, 'Sensibility: A Poetical Epistle to the Hon. Mrs Boscawen' from *Sacred Dramas: Chiefly Intended for Young Persons: The Subjects Taken from the Bible, Romanticism: An Anthology with CD-ROM*, ed. Duncan Wu, 3rd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2006) 56-66. Although More does not mention William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith, and William Cowper, Charlotte Smith, and Anne Yearsley may be added to this poetic catalogue. William Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781) and Ann Yearsley's 'Addressed to Sensibility' (1787) also deal with the theme of sensibility. R. W. Babcock has catalogued eighteenth-century discourses of 'sentiment' and 'sensibility' published in a variety of British periodicals. R. W. Babcock, 'Benevolence, Sensibility and Sentiment in Some Eighteenth-Century Periodicals,' *Modern Language Notes* 62.6 (1947): 394-97.

I mourn heroic Justice, scarcely owned,  
And Principle for sentiment dethroned.  
While Feeling boasts her ever-tearful eye,  
Stern Truth, firm Faith, and manly Virtue fly. (233-38)<sup>39</sup>

The ‘sympathy divine’ (233) here is juxtaposed with ‘blessed Compassion’ (297) and ‘Angel Charity’ (297) respectively. Such a depiction attests to the fact that the ‘ever-tearful eye’ (237) became a visible emblem of the man of ‘Feeling’ (237) with delicate sensibility or ‘sentiment’ (236) through the interaction of these two literary periods.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) helps us to further apprehend the central tenets of this literary movement through its definitions of ‘sentiment’ and ‘sensibility’ at that time:

Refined and tender emotion; exercise or manifestation of ‘sensibility’; emotional reflection or meditation; appeal to the tender emotions in literature or art. Now chiefly in derisive use, conveying an imputation of either insincerity or mawkishness. (‘Sentiment’ 9a)

In the 18th and early 19th c. (afterwards somewhat *rarely*): Capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; also, readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art. (‘Sensibility’ 6)

Although both words relate to ‘emotions in literature or art,’ the above definition of ‘sentiment’ is defined as an ‘exercise or manifestation of “sensibility”’ and cites a further usage of ‘sentiment’ as a sign of ‘civilized’ and ‘fine feelings’ from Lawrence

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<sup>39</sup> For a recent general overview concerning the idea of sensibility in eighteenth-century Britain, see John Brewer, ‘Sentiment and Sensibility,’ *The Cambridge History of English Romantic Literature*, ed. James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 21-42, vol. 4 of *The New Cambridge History of English Literature*, 5 vols., to date, 1999-.

Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768).<sup>40</sup> Significantly, both 'sentiment' and 'sensibility' have in common a 'tender emotion' and 'compassion.' The importance of such tender feelings is demonstrated by a quotation in the *OED* taken from William Cowper's 'To Miss Macartney': 'Oh! grant, kind heav'n, to me, Long as I draw ethereal air, Sweet Sensibility'(65-67).<sup>41</sup> This kind of 'Sweet Sensibility' in Cowper's poetry is a sign of refinement for middle-class men at the time, as shown by Marianne's comments about Edward, the future husband of her sensible sister, Elinor, in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*: 'Nay, mama, if he is not to be animated by Cowper! —but we must allow for difference of taste. [...] But it would have broke *my* heart had I loved him, to hear him read with so little sensibility.'<sup>42</sup> Elinor's words emphasise the whole ethos of the age of sensibility as a literary movement, and simultaneously, points to the importance of another term 'taste,' in eighteenth-century moral philosophy, ethics and aesthetics.

### **Sensibility and Moral Philosophy in the 'Age of Sensibility'**

In the eighteenth-century, 'philosophy' extended to psychological theories such as 'associationism.'<sup>43</sup> This point is exemplified by 'associationism,' '[t]he doctrine that

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<sup>40</sup> Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey: And Other Writings*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) 3.

<sup>41</sup> William Cowper, 'To Miss Macartney,' *The Poems of William Cowper: 1748-1782*, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 76. All poems of Cowper are taken from this collection.

<sup>42</sup> Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. James Kinsley, intro. Margaret Anne Doody, note Clare Lamont (2004; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 14.

<sup>43</sup> For a study of the formation of modern psychology in the late eighteenth century, see Robert Hoeldtke, 'The History of Associationism and British Medical Psychology,' *Medical History* 11 (1967): 46-65; Edward S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from*

mental and moral phenomena may be accounted for by association of ideas' (*OED*).

The chief exponents of associationism in the British empirical tradition were John Locke, David Hartley, George Berkeley, David Hume, and Joseph Priestley. Locke's and Hartley's associationism highlighted the functions of perception, sensation, and thought, which later intrigued the imaginations of Romantic poets. As a matter of fact, Coleridge and Wordsworth were influenced by Hartley in the theories advanced in their co-written first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).<sup>44</sup> For Walter Jackson Bate, both eighteenth-century poetry and Romantic poetry depend on 'suggestiveness' or 'nuances of feeling' entailed with poetic 'expression[s]' that the poet's mental 'impression[s]' create.<sup>45</sup>

The psychological aspect of sensibility is also concomitant with aesthetic taste in both literature and moral philosophy.<sup>46</sup> The relationship between sense-perception and aesthetic judgement is a key issue in the history of literature and philosophy, precisely because aesthetics were originally inextricable from the study of sensation.<sup>47</sup> As we have seen previously, 'sensibility' is also defined in terms of a 'delicate sensitiveness of

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*Erasmus Darwin to William James* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997) 1-37; Robert Brown, 'Psychology,' *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, gen. ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 361-69; and Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (2003; London: Penguin, 2004) 347-73.

<sup>44</sup> See R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, Introduction, *Lyrical Ballads*, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 20-22; Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2000) 291. For Coleridge's reception of Hartley, see Alan Richardson, *Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* 9-12.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premise of Taste in Eighteenth Century England* (New York: Harper, 1946) 153-59.

<sup>46</sup> It was Walter Jackson Bate, who first explored details of the relations between associationism and the formation of aesthetic taste in England from the eighteenth century to the age of Romanticism (*From Classic to Romantic* 93-192 [esp. 176]).

<sup>47</sup> The term 'aesthetics' was originally coined by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. For a summary of the formation of eighteenth-century German aesthetics, see Hans Reiss 'The Rise of Aesthetics from Baumgarten to Humboldt,' Nisbet and Rawson, 658-80.

taste' in the *OED*. The eighteenth-century history of sensibility as a delicacy of taste has a long-standing tradition originating from Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Edmund Burke (especially his theory of beauty and the sublime).<sup>48</sup> All of these philosophers build their theories on a kind of pleasure principle (distinguishing between judgements of pleasant or painful sensations). Hutcheson, for example, states that 'Many Objects are naturally displeasing, and distasteful to our external Senses, as well as others pleasing and agreeable; as Smells, Tastes, and some separate Sounds.'<sup>49</sup>

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, these aesthetic themes were followed by numerous studies on taste, such as Alexander Gerard's *An Essay on Taste* (1759) and *Essay on Genius* (1774), philosophical writings (and poems) by James Beattie.<sup>50</sup> In

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<sup>48</sup> Burke's theory of the sublime influenced gothic fiction writers such as Ann Radcliffe (to use Radcliffe's words, the 'union of grandeur and obscurity'). See Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry,' *Gothic Readings: The First Wave, 1764-1840*, ed. Rictor Norton (2000; London: Continuum, 2006) 315. See also Patricia M. Spacks, 'How We See: The 1790's,' *Enlightening Romanticism, Romanticising the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750-1832*, ed. Miriam L. Wallace (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) 179-88.

<sup>49</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold, rev. ed. (2004; Minneapolis: Liberty, 2008) 61. For a succinct summary of these philosophers' aesthetic theories, see Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660-1780*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000). For the reception of these philosophers among British Romantic poets, see Laurence S. Lockridge, *The Ethics of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) 39-74.

<sup>50</sup> Gerard emphasises the importance of 'a principle, distinct from all the internal senses, from which taste will, in many instances, receive assistance. It is such a *sensibility of heart*, as fits a man for being easily moved and for readily catching, as by infection, any passion that a work is fitted to excite.' Alexander Gerard, *An Essay on Taste: To Which Are Annexed Three Dissertations on the Same Subject by Mr De Voltaire, Mr D'Alembert, and Mr De Montesquieu*, 2nd ed. (1759; Edinburgh, 1764) 81. James Beattie notes on the relation of poetry to sympathy: 'Nor can a piece of real and pleasing poetry be extended to any great length, without operating, directly or indirectly, either on those affections that are friendly to virtue, or on those sympathies that quicken our moral sensibility, and prepare us for virtuous impressions.' James Beattie, *Essays: On Poetry and Music, as They Affect the Mind; On Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition; On the Usefulness of Classical Learning* (London, 1779) 24-25. See also Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind: On the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Derek R. Brooks (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997); and Joseph Priestley, *Lectures on Oratory and*

addition, Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790) also addressed the relation between emotion and sensation (131-32), showing some affinity with Immanuel Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement.<sup>51</sup> This trend of aesthetic judgment lasted well into the early-nineteenth century, as testified to by Richard Payne Knight's *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principle of Taste* (1805), Dugald Stewart 'On Taste' in *Philosophical Essays* (1810), and Hazlitt's essay 'On Gusto' (1816).<sup>52</sup> For many of these moral philosophers, sensibility in the form of aesthetic taste was reliant on the power of sympathy, as encapsulated by Joseph Priestley's explanation in *Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (1777) that '[t]he more vivid are a man's ideas, and the greater is his general sensibility, the more intirely, and with the greater facility, doth he adapt himself to the situations he is viewing' (127).<sup>53</sup>

### **Nervous Disease: Excessive Sensibility and Its Perils**

In the age of sensibility, 'delicate sensitiveness of taste' is a sign of the man of feeling, together with high morality and virtue.<sup>54</sup> Sensibility is essential to create poetry.<sup>55</sup> The

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*Criticism* (London, 1777).

<sup>51</sup> For the relation of Alison to Kant, see Paul Guyer, *Values of Beauty* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 208-15 and Bate, *From Classic to Romantic* 152. For Reid and Kant, see Reed, 23-27.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principle of Taste* (London, 1805); Dugald, Stewart, *Philosophical Essays*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1816) 449-518; and William Hazlitt, 'On Gusto,' *The Round Table*, 4: 77-80. See also Bate *From Classic to Romantic* 175-76 and Richard Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (London: Macmillan, 1981) 22-25.

<sup>53</sup> James Engell succinctly summarises sensibility as the 'sympathetic imagination.' James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981) 155-157. Engell defines 'empathy' as a 'translation of German *Einfühlung*' (157-60). For a formal approach to the concept of empathetic imagery in the poetry of Keats and Shelley, see also Fogle, *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley* 139-83.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher Nagle discusses 'a continuity between the traditions of Sensibility and of Romanticism' in terms of the notion of sympathy and its pleasure (alongside its perils), by reading Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806) and Germaine de

proper use of sensibility was conceived of as an essential discipline to lead a happy life.

Adam Smith succinctly writes in *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* (1759): 'A humane and polished people, who have more sensibility to the passions of others, can more readily enter into an animated and passionate behaviour, and can easily pardon some little excess' (V.2.10).<sup>56</sup>

As Janet M. Todd and G. J. Barker-Benfield have noted, the concept of sensibility especially related to female nerves in the age of sensibility and Romanticism.<sup>57</sup> In fact, numerous women poets and writers published novels, poems, or other types of fictions on sensibility, including *Louisa: A Sentimental Novel* (1771) by an anonymous author.<sup>58</sup> This kind of discourse is confirmed by Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). Johnson, like many of his contemporary authors, defines the word 'sensibility' as 'quickness of sensation' or 'quickness of perception,' and the word 'sentiment' as 'Fellow feeling; mutual sensibility; the quality of being affected by the

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Stael's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807). Christopher Nagle, 'Travelling Pleasure and Perils of Sensibility,' *The Wordsworth Circle* 39.1-2 (2008): 49-52.

<sup>55</sup> For the relations between eighteenth-century aesthetics and psychology concerned with taste and the psychological aspects of women writers such as Jane Austen and Charlotte Smith, see Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion* esp. 17-50; Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Analysis of Beauty* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) esp. 37-116; and Price, *Revolutions in Taste, 1773-1818* 103-33; and Claire Knowles, *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) esp. 45-72.

<sup>56</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1982) 207, rept. of vol. 1 of *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976). For the details of Smith's theory of sentiment and his contemporary social backgrounds in Scotland, see John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1987) and *The Age of Passions: An Interpretation of Adam Smith and Scottish Enlightenment Culture* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 1998); and Mark Salber Philips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740-1820* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000) esp. 31-128.

<sup>57</sup> Todd, *Sensibility* 111-28; and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth Century Britain* (1992; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996) 23-36.

<sup>58</sup> Jennifer Keith, 'Poetry, Sentiment, and Sensibility' 135-36.



affection of another,' citing the following quotation from Joseph Addison's *The Spectator*: 'Modesty is a kind of quick and delicate feeling in the soul: it is such an exquisite *sensibility*, as warns a woman to shun the first appearance of every thing hurtful.'<sup>59</sup> This quotation is from No 231 written on November 24, 1711:

Modesty is not only an Ornament, but also a Guard to Vertue. It is a kind of quick and delicate *feeling* in the Soul, which makes her shrink and withdraw her self from every thing that has Danger in it. It is such an exquisite Sensibility, as warns her to shun the first appearance of every thing which is hurtful.<sup>60</sup>

In the original passage, Addison writes about the human 'Soul.' Johnson's substitution of 'the Soul' for 'a woman,' whether unconsciously or consciously, misleads the reader into believing that Addison was writing about female virtue rather than virtue in general. This is a telling example of the extent to which the association of female virtue with sensibility permeated British writing about the taste, the senses, and sensibility.<sup>61</sup>

Addison's use of the word '[m]odesty' also suggests the danger of excessive sensibility for women. *Sense and Sensibility* illuminates this point through the portrayal of Marianne's delicate sensibility, in which 'Elinor saw, with concern, the excess of her

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<sup>59</sup> Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals, and Illustrated in Their Different significations by Examples from the Best Writers. To Which are Prefixed, a History of the Language, and an English Grammar* (London: Times, 1979).

<sup>60</sup>See [Joseph Addison and Richard Steele,] *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) 399.

<sup>61</sup> For a reading of Richardson's *Clarissa* from a perspective of 'nervous sensibility' in relation to eighteenth-century physio-psychological concerns, see Raymond Stephanson, 'Richardson's "Nerves": The Physiology of Sensibility in *Clarissa*,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49.2. (1988): 267-85. For a more psychological approach rather than physiological, see also Brissenden, 159-86; Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 60-82; and Lisa Zunshine, 'Richardson's *Clarissa* and a Theory of Mind,' *The Work of Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity*, ed. Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) 127-46.

sister's sensibility' (6). Excessive sensibility in women has to be supported and recovered by the male senses, which are identified with the powers of reason.<sup>62</sup> Equally, Byron's poem 'To Romance' (1807), in his characteristic sardonic style, reflects on this overemphasis on sensibility:

Romance! disgusted with deceit,  
Far from thy motley court I fly,  
Where Affection holds her seat,  
And sickly Sensibility;  
Whose silly tears can never flow  
For any pangs excepting thine;  
[.....]  
Now join with sable Sympathy,  
With cypress crown'd, array'd in weeds,  
Who heaves with thee her simple sigh,  
Whose breast for every bosom bleeds [...]. (33-38, 41-44)<sup>63</sup>

This female pair of 'sickly Sensibility' (36) and 'sable Sympathy' (41) marks a rather negative attitude towards excessive sensibility.<sup>64</sup>

In the case of the masculine, a strong sensibility or sentiment is, as John Brewer

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<sup>62</sup> As a possible source of *Sense and Sensibility*, Claire Lamont introduces a short allegory published in the second issue of *The Lady's Monthly Museum* (1798-1799), in which male Sense rescues female Sensibility from seduction by masculine Susceptibility (*Sense and Sensibility* 301n1). See also Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* 359-68; and Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion* 17-49.

<sup>63</sup> George Gordon Byron, 'To Romance,' *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, vol. 1 of 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 205-06 (hereafter all Byron's poems are taken from this collection). This poem may have been influenced by James Gillray's caricatures. Gillray draws a satirical figure of sensibility in his political caricature entitled *New Morality* (1798). James Gillray, *New Morality: Or The Promis'd Installment of the High-Priest of the Theophilanthropes, with the Homage of Leviathan and His Suite* (London, 1798), *Princeton University Digital Collection*, Princeton 10th Jan. 2011  
<[http://diglib.princeton.edu/view?\\_xq=pageturner&\\_start=1&\\_doc=%2Fmets%2Fgc108.mets.xml&\\_index=302&\\_inset=1#metadataContent](http://diglib.princeton.edu/view?_xq=pageturner&_start=1&_doc=%2Fmets%2Fgc108.mets.xml&_index=302&_inset=1#metadataContent)>.

<sup>64</sup> In the case of Shelley, Julian in *Julian and Maddalo* (1818)—these two protagonists are, interestingly, modelled on Shelley and Byron—is a stereotype of eighteenth-century man of excessive sensibility. See Ralph Pite, Headnote, 'Julian and Maddalo,' *POS* 2:660.

notes, associated with moral virtue, but excessive sensibility was considered as a sign of mental ‘weakness’ and ‘melancholia.’<sup>65</sup> Adam Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* makes this point by drawing a comparison between the ‘masculine firmness’ of ‘savages’ and men from ‘civilized nations’: ‘hardiness is the character most suitable to the circumstances of a savage; sensibility to those of one who lives in a very civilized society.’ (209).

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1790), Mary Wollstonecraft, conversely, objected to the over-feminisation of sensibility, claiming that ‘female sensibility’ is constructed on the basis of educational circumstances determined by men. Wollstonecraft writes:

‘The power of the woman,’ says some author, ‘is her sensibility’; and men, not aware of the consequence, do all they can to make this power swallow up every other. Those who constantly employ their sensibility will have most: for example; poets, painters, and composers. Yet, when the sensibility is thus increased at the expense of reason, and even the imagination, why do philosophical men complain of their fickleness? The sexual attention of man particularly acts on female sensibility, and this sympathy has been exercised from their youth up. A husband cannot long pay those attentions with the passion necessary to excite lively emotions, and the heart, accustomed to lively emotions, turns to a new lover, or pines in secret, the prey of virtue or prudence.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See Brissenden, 65-95; and John Brewer, ‘Sentiment and Sensibility’ 29.

<sup>66</sup> See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 5. of 7 vols. (London: Pickering, 1989) 133. All the works of Mary Wollstonecraft are taken from this collection. See also Mitzi Myers, ‘Sensibility and the “Walk of Reason”: Mary Wollstonecraft’s Literary Reviews as Cultural Critique,’ *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics*, ed. Syndy MacMillen Conger (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1990) 133-34. On sexuality and sensibility in the eighteenth century, see Jean H. Hagstrum, *Sex and Sensibility: Ideal and Erotic Love from Milton to Mozart* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980).

Prior to this passage, Wollstonecraft wrote in her novel *Mary, a Fiction* (1788) that sensibility, in its very essence, is no different between women and men, but rather universal amongst all human beings as ‘the most exquisite feeling of which the human soul is susceptible.’<sup>67</sup> Wollstonecraft believes that ‘Sensibility is indeed the foundation of all our happiness; but these raptures are unknown to the depraved sensualist, who is only moved by what strikes his gross senses’ (*Mary* 43).<sup>68</sup> Wollstonecraft further remarks on how sensibility has a significant effect on the education of children in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1797).<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Sarah Trimmer warned against ghost stories or fairy tales on the grounds that the powerful imaginings that they stimulate promote an excessive sensibility which may grow harmful for education.<sup>70</sup> The centrality of education to a proper sensibility was also urged by Erasmus Darwin and Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Treatment of Nervous Disorder through Sympathy**

In sentimental fiction of the ‘age of sensibility,’ sensibility and sentiment are both

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<sup>67</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary, a Fiction*, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, 1:59.

<sup>68</sup> See also Syndy McMillen Conger, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Language of Sensibility* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1994) 35-60.

<sup>69</sup> See Conger, 69-82.

<sup>70</sup> See Gary Kelly, ‘Romantic Fiction,’ *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010) 189. See also Julie Ellison, ‘The Politics of Fancy in the Age of Romanticism,’ *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994) 228-55. On the educative role of sentimental fiction in the later eighteenth century, see Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility* 236-37.

<sup>71</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education, in Boarding Schools* (London, 1797) 56; and Maria Edgeworth and Richard Lovell Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 3 vols. (London, 1801) 1:105-17, 136-51, 2:1-53 [esp. 51-53]. For the education of sensibility by contemporary women writers such as Helen Maria Williams and Mary Hay, see Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 30-125.

associated with the nervous system. Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* encapsulates this notion with the apostrophe 'Dear Sensibility! [...] eternal foundation of our feelings!':

I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself—all comes from thee, great—great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation.—Touch'd with thee, Eugenius draws my curtain when I languish—hears my tale of symptoms, and blames the weather for the disorder of his nerves. (98)<sup>72</sup>

Sterne employs the physiological terms 'nerves' and 'SENSORIUM' equated with the 'brain' or 'mind' (*OED* b).<sup>73</sup> This correlation between body and mind in the concept of sensibility goes hand-in-hand with the development of eighteenth-century medical discourses conducted by George Cheyne, Alexander Monro, William Cullen, Robert Whytt, William and John Hunter, John Brown, and others.<sup>74</sup> Cheyne's *The English*

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<sup>72</sup> For Sterne's notion of sensibility and its legacy to Shelley and other Romantic authors, see Christopher Nagle, 'Sterne, Shelley, and Sensibility's Pleasures of Proximity,' *ELH* 70.3 (2003): 813-45. This topic is enlarged in the following book. Christopher C. Nagle, *Sexuality and The Culture of Sensibility in the British Romantic Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007).

<sup>73</sup> For details of Sterne's concept of sensorium, see John A. Dussinger, 'The Sensorium in the World of *A Sentimental Journey*,' *Ariel* 13 (1982): 3-16.

<sup>74</sup> The theme of nervous disorder in British novels is already seen in Jonathan Swift's works such as *A Tale of Tub* (1703). See Marjorie Perlman Lorch, 'Explorations of the Brain, Mind and Medicine in the Writings of Jonathan Swift,' *Brain, Mind, and Medicine: Neuroscience in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Harry Whitaker, C.U.M. Smith, and Stanley Finger (New York: Springer, 2007) 345-52. George S. Rousseau has explored the psycho-physiological aspect of the sensibility movement in eighteenth-century cultural history. Rousseau quotes the following passage on Sir William Thornhill from Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in which he is diagnosed by physicians as 'so exquisitely sensible' that 'what some have thus suffered in their persons this gentleman felt in his mind. The slightest distress, whether real or fictitious, touched him to the quick, and his soul laboured under a sickly sensibility of the miseries of others.' George S. Rousseau, 'Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres: Towards Defining the Origins of Sensibility (1975),' *Nervous Acts* 174; and Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (2006; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 19. For other studies of the relations between the age of sensibility and the physiological discourses of the time, see Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imagining the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge MA: MIT P, 1993), 401-63; Anne C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), 13-42; Roy Porter, *Enlightenment* 276-94; and Kimiyo Ogawa, 'Eighteenth-century Medical Discourse and

*Malady* (1733) is one of the earliest examples to discuss the use of fibres and nerves in medical terms.<sup>75</sup> This correlation between nervous disorder and excessive sensibility was further examined in Whytt's *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of Those Disorders which Are Commonly Called Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysteric* (1764) and Cullen's *First Lines of Practice of Physic* (1778-84).<sup>76</sup> Even in the age of Romanticism, these medical theories were taken up by their successors, one of which was Thomas Trotter, who published *An Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical, on Drunkenness* (1804) and *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1807).<sup>77</sup>

The medical discourse of nervous temperament was shared by Romantic authors such as Coleridge. In a section entitled 'On Sensibility' from *Aids to Reflection* (1825), Coleridge relates excessive sensibility to nervous illness in the body. Although sensibility is, for Coleridge, 'a constitutional quickness of Sympathy with Pain and Pleasure' in relation to 'the Moral Principle' and 'Virtue,' this 'occurrence of excessive and unhealthy sensitiveness,' for Coleridge, turns into '*nervous[ness]*' as 'Vice.'<sup>78</sup>

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Sensible Bodies: Sensibility and Selfhood in the Works of William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley,' Diss., U of Glasgow, 2004, 10-51

<sup>75</sup> George Cheyne, *The English Malady, or a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of All Kinds*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1991) 14-24; 68-89. For nervousness as an 'English Malady,' see Porter, *Enlightenment* 282-4.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Melville Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1997) 15-42. For the development of neurology and the treatment of nervous disorder From Hunter to Beddoes, see Roy Porter, *Mind-forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987) 169-84.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Trotter, *An Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical, on Drunkenness, and Its Effects on the Human Body*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1988) and *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (New York: Arno, 1976).

<sup>78</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. John Beer (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 57-60, vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 23 vols., Kathleen Coburn, gen. ed., 1969-2002. All quotations from Coleridge's works are taken from this edition. For Coleridge's attack on Sensibility, see also Todd, *Sensibility* 140.

Coleridge further states that ‘Sensibility (the Sensibility, I mean, here spoken of), is for the greater part a quality of the nerves, and a result of individual bodily temperament’ (9:58).

This discourse of nervous temperament was also linked to the discourse of vitalism, the doctrine of organic life (animal spirits) which is irreducible to physical mechanism. In continental Europe, the eighteenth-century physiological discourses of life sciences (formed by Albrecht von Haller) involved Luigi Galvani’s electrophysiology or ‘Galvanism.’ Galvani’s theory also correlated with vitalism.<sup>79</sup> Continental vitalism had a certain influence on British life scientists or natural philosophers such as Whytt, Priestley, John Thelwall, Erasmus Darwin, Thomas Beddoes, Humphry Davy, and so forth.<sup>80</sup> In addition to this, there was a famous debate over the secret of life between the immaterialist John Abernethy, a prestigious surgeon at St Bartholomew’s hospital in London, and William Lawrence, a materialist surgeon who was also Shelley’s friend and physician.<sup>81</sup>

The impact of vitalism on the (neuro-)physiological discourses of the time is also confirmed by Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and the preface added later by Mary for the 1831 edition, in which she states that the inspiration of her story came from

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<sup>79</sup> Robert J. Richards, ‘Chapter 9, Appendix: Theories of Irritability, Sensibility, and Vital Force from Haller to Humboldt,’ *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe*, ed. Robert J. Richards (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002) 313-21.

<sup>80</sup> For details of the vitalist movement in the age of Shelley, see Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* 24-73. With regard to an overview of the relationship between Romantic poets and contemporary life science, see Hermione De Almeida, ‘Romanticism and the Triumph of Life Science: Prospects for Study,’ *Studies in Romanticism* 43.1 (2004): 119-34.

<sup>81</sup> For details of this debate and Shelley’s circle, see Marilyn Butler, Introduction, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*, Mary Shelley, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford, 1994) xv-xxi.

Shelley and Byron's conversation: 'Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth.'<sup>82</sup> This passage on vitalism ('galvanism') and the fluid of life may reflect the medical theory of John Abernethy's *Surgical Observations on the Constitutional Origin and Treatment of Local Diseases; and on Aneurisms* (1809), which influenced the younger Shelley's interest in the senses and the physical body.<sup>83</sup>

The essential part of Shelley's understanding of vitalism is that Shelley associates this vital force with human sympathy. This idea of sympathetic force is influenced by Abernethy, who identified such sympathetic powers with electric fluid or magnetic force.<sup>84</sup> For Shelley, without this power of sympathy, humans could not live. In his essay 'On Love' Shelley writes: 'Sterne says that, if he were in a desert, he would love

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<sup>82</sup> Mary Shelley, Introduction, *Frankenstein: Or, Modern Prometheus*, ed. Stuart Curran, April 2009, Para. 10, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, 4 February 2011 <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/frankenstein/1831v1/intro.html>>.

<sup>83</sup> John Abernethy, *Surgical Observations on the Constitutional Origin and Treatment of Local Diseases; and on Aneurisms*, vol. 1 of *The Surgical Works* (London 1809). For details of the connection between Shelley and Abernethy, see Sharon Ruston, 'Vegetarianism and Vitality in the Work of Thomas Forster, William Lawrence and P. B. Shelley,' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 54 (2005): 120 (hereafter 'Vegetarianism and Vitality').

<sup>84</sup> See Nora Crook and Derek Guiton, *Shelley's Venomed Melody* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 28; and Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* 84. This sympathetic and magnetic force in the human body seems to be derived from the practice of 'mesmerism,' popularised by the German physiologist, Franz Anton Mesmer. Mesmer conceived 'animal magnetism,' as a magnetic fluid that resided in animal bodies. In his stay in Italy, Shelley sometimes underwent this treatment given by Jane Williams, the model of the lyric 'The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient' (I will discuss this controversial fluid later on in Chapter VI). See also Nigel Leask, 'Shelley's "Magnetic Ladies": Romantic Mesmerism and the Politics of the Body,' *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts, 1780-1832*, ed. Stephen Copley and John C. Whale (London: Routledge, 1992) 53-78. For a succinct summary of mesmerism in Europe, see Stafford, *Body Criticism* 450-63. For the relation of mesmerism and passion in the Romantic era, see Charles J. Rzepka, 'Re-collecting Spontaneous Overflows: Romantic Passions, the Sublime, and Mesmerism,' *Romantic Passions*, ed. Elizabeth Fay, April 1998, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, 9 February 2011 <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/passions/pcts.html>>.



some cypress...So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was' (*SPP* 504)<sup>85</sup> Sympathy and love is Shelley's solution to ensure the healthy temperament of nerves and body. Even beyond this, the power of sympathetic emotion constitutes Shelley's poetics of sensibility. As Herbert Read rightly says, '[i]nsomuch as the final quality of Shelley's poetry is infinitude, so the final quality of his mind is sympathy' (287). This suggests the centrality of the relationship between sympathy and pleasure in Shelley's poetics of sensibility.

#### 4. Shelley's Education of Moral Sentiments

##### The Pleasure of Sympathy in Shelley's Poetry

Shelley's poetic sympathy is inseparable from his 'passion for reforming the world' (*POS* 2:475). This phrase originally taken from Robert Forsyth's *Principles of Moral Science* (1805) suggests that Shelley shares some of the same ideas as the Enlightenment thinkers, but transforms them into his own originality poetic vision.<sup>86</sup> For instance, when considering the concept of happiness in the world, Shelley differentiates it from mere pleasure. In his letter to Elizabeth Hitchener on 11 November 1811 Shelley says:

What is Love, or Friendship, is it something material, a *ball* an *apple* a *plaything* which must be taken from one to be given to another. Is it capable of no extension, no communication.—Ld. Kames defines love to

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<sup>85</sup> See also Nagle, 'Sterne, Shelley, and Sensibility's Pleasures of Proximity' 817.

<sup>86</sup> Peacock also quotes this phrase in *Nightmare Abbey* and *Melincourt* (1817). See *POS* 2:475n115-18.

be a particularization of the general passion, but this is the love of sensation of sentiment. The absurdest of absurd vanities; it is the love of pleasure, not the love of happiness.—The one is a love which is self-centred self devoted self-interested; it desires it's [*sic*] *own* interest, it is the parent of jealousy, its object is the plaything which it desires to monopolize—selfishness, monopoly is its very soul, & to communicate to others part of this love were to d{es}troy its essence, to annihilate this chain of straw. (*LPBS* 1: 173)

Shelley ponders on what differentiates selfish-pleasure or 'the love of sensation of sentiment' from the real 'love of happiness.' Shelley goes on to say:

—But Love, the Love which *we* worship—Virtue Heaven disinterestedness, in a word friendship, which has as much to do with the senses as with yonder mountains—that which seeks the good of all; the good of it's object first, not because that object is a minister to *it's* pleasures, not merely because it even contributes to its happiness; but because it is really worthy, because it has power sensibilities is capable of abstracting self and loving virtue for Virtues own loveliness, desiring the happiness of others *not* from the obligation of fearing Hell or desiring Heaven, but for pure simple unsophisticated Virtue. (*LPBS* 1: 173)

Shelley finds real happiness in 'Virtues.' Moreover, the 'disinterestedness' of 'Virtue'—which is free from 'self-interested[ness]'—engenders not only 'happiness,' but also 'pleasure' and the power of 'sensibilities' that supports 'loving virtue for Virtues['] own loveliness.'

Shelley's poetics of sensibility aspired to nurture morality and virtues from the beginning of his career as a poet. Before the publication of *Queen Mab* (1813), Shelley actually reveals his own anxiety about the limited social impact of his poem, as he senses that his poem will not be accepted among a very large number of readers: 'I

expect no success. Let only 250 Copies be printed. A small neat Quarto, on fine paper & so as to catch the aristocrats: They will not read it, but their sons & daughters may' (LPBS 1: 361).<sup>87</sup> Similarly, when publishing *Laon and Cythna* (1817), Shelley sought to champion 'the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality' in order to kindle 'within the bosom' of his readers 'a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice.'<sup>88</sup> Shelley continues:

For this purpose I have chosen a story of human passion in its most universal character, diversified with moving and romantic adventures, and appealing, in contempt of all artificial opinions and institutions, to the common sympathies of every human breast. I have made no attempt to recommend the motives which I would substitute for those at present governing mankind by methodological and systematic argument. I would only awaken the feelings, so that the reader should see the beauty of true virtue, and be incited to those enquiries which have led to my moral and political creed, and that of some of the sublimest intellects in the world.

(POS 2:32-33)

Through his narrative on 'the beauty of true virtue,' Shelley avoids making his poem a straightforwardly simple piece of political propaganda:

The Poem therefore, (with the exception of the first Canto, which is purely introductory), is narrative, not didactic. It is a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring

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<sup>87</sup> With regard to the transmission of Shelley's messages through poetry, Andrew Franta draws out from Shelley's poetics and its dissemination 'larger structural changes in how we continue to think about the public conditions of literary reception and transmission.' Franta regards this as 'a crucial moment' in literary history, 'for the eclipse of authorial intention as the primary focus of literary interpretation in twentieth-century criticism finds its origin in the emphasis on reception and transmission to be found, among other places to be sure, in Shelley's late poetics.' Andrew Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 114. For a general study of the reader-writer relationship in the age of Romanticism, see Thomas J McCarthy, *Relationships of Sympathy: The Writer and the Reader in British Romanticism* (Aldershot: Scholar, 1997).

<sup>88</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface, *Laon and Cythna*, POS, 2:32.

after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind; its influence in refining and making pure the most daring and uncommon impulses of the imagination, the understanding, and the senses. (*POS* 2:33)

Shelley's insistence on moral education without didacticism remained constant throughout his life. In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley claims: 'Didactic poetry is my abhorrence [...]. My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence' (*SPP* 209).<sup>89</sup>

Sensibility, for Shelley, operates as an agent to transmit the poet's inspiration to the reader's mind. To create such inspiration writings, the writer, for Shelley, must be trained and must have enjoyed 'an education peculiarly fitted for a Poet, without which, genius and sensibility can hardly fill the circle of their capacities' (*POS* 2:39). In Shelley's view, what poets contribute to society is not very different from 'the Historians and the Metaphysicians,' especially in so far as they 'have looked upon the beautiful and majestic scenery of the earth as common sources of those elements which it is the province of the Poet to embody and combine' (2:40-41).<sup>90</sup>

### **From Sympathy to Inspiration: Shelley's Art of Sensation**

As we have seen Shelley insists on inspiring the reader's enthusiasm for moral

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<sup>89</sup> Shelley states in his preface to *The Cenci* (1819) that '[t]he highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself.' Percy Besshe Shelley, Preface, *The Cenci*, *POS*, 2:730.

<sup>90</sup> Shelley, simultaneously, warns against a metaphysical education: 'Metaphysics, and enquiries into moral and political science, have become little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions, or sophisms like those of Mr Malthus, calculated to lull the oppressors of mankind into a security of everlasting triumph' (*POS* 2:37-38).

excellence without recourse to didactic poetry. A passage from the preface to *Laon and Cythna* elaborates this point:

And if the lofty passions with which it has been my scope to distinguish this story, shall not excite in the reader a generous impulse, an ardent thirst for excellence, an interest profound and strong, such as belongings to no meaner desires—let not the failure be imputed to a natural unfitness for human sympathy in these sublime and animating themes. It is the business of the Poet to communicate to others the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings in the vivid presence of which within his own mind, consists at once his inspiration and his reward. (*POS* 2:34)

Shelley believes that the nature of the poet is ‘to communicate’ and to influence his readers through ‘the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings.’ These figures of speech provide the poet with sensuous pleasure even in the world of imagination, where he (rhapsodically) creates poetry with a variety of physical images. This experience of vivid imagination is mediated often through the power of sympathy powered by imagination and sensibility, including both physical sensation—through the five senses and kinaesthesia—and moral sentiment.

In line with Shelley’s poetics of sensibility, the tragic endings of *Alastor* (1815), *The Cenci*, and ‘The Sensitive-Plant’ (1819), still awaken strong feelings in the reader’s or audience’s mind. In the case of Shelley’s poetics of sensibility, aesthetic experience—what the poet’s sympathy and imagination bring into being—is not merely simple pleasure and happiness. Shelley writes in *A Defence of Poetry* that ‘even in the desire and the regret they leave, there cannot but be pleasure, participating as it does in

the nature of its object' (*SPP* 532).<sup>91</sup> Consequently, as Pottle said, Shelley is able to find pleasure and beauty even within displeasure:

It [poetry] transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life [...].  
(*SPP* 533)

The important point to note here is how the power of 'sympathy' in the author-reader relationship works as a 'secret alchemy' which transforms the ugly into the beautiful. For Shelley's poetics of sensibility, 'sympathy' is indispensable to create poetry which 'touches' the human heart. Shelley's poetry of sensibility focuses on its sympathetic power to produce sensuous 'pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings' in the reader's mind. Shelley states in *A Defence of Poetry*: 'An equal sensibility to the influence of the senses and the affections is to be found in the writings of Homer and Sophocles: the former especially has clothed sensual and pathetic images with irresistible attractions' (*SPP* 521). With this sympathetic sensibility, poets can stave off the corruption of their society, by virtue of their 'sensibility to pleasure, passion, and natural scenery': 'For the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure; and therefore it is corruption' (*SPP* 522). Focusing on the sense of taste and its vicarious pleasure and displeasure depicted in *Queen Mab*, the next chapter explores the youthful Shelley's poetic treatment of social and political corruption.

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<sup>91</sup> Pottle comments that Shelley 'is even too much aware of the disgusting, the ugly, the painful, and the horrible' (601).

## Chapter II

### ‘Taste the Joys Which Mingled Sense and Spirit Yield’:

#### Shelley’s Political Gastronomy and the Aesthetics of Sensibility in *Queen Mab*

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

But flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

—Genesis—

Dare to say what ‘apple’ truly is.

This sweetness that feels thick, dark, dense at first;  
then, exquisitely lifted in your taste,

grows clarified, awake and luminous,  
double-meaninged, sunny, earthy, real—:  
Oh knowledge, pleasure—inexhaustible.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Sonnets to Orpheus*—

#### Ethics, Aesthetics, and Political Gastronomy in *Queen Mab*

This chapter focuses on Shelley’s early political poem *Queen Mab* by examining its imagery of the sense of taste and distaste, and its relationship to Shelley’s political thought, moral virtues, and aesthetics. Shelley’s awareness of taste in *Queen Mab* works on the two levels of physical and mental taste. Both are inseparably linked to his practice of vegetarianism as theorised in the long ‘Note 17’ to *Queen Mab*, which was later published independently under the title of *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813).

Shelley, initially, took an interest in vegetarianism because of his anxieties about his own physical health, but his theory became increasingly politicised under the influence of contemporary vegetarian theorists, who emphasised the idea that physical health was inextricable from politics.<sup>1</sup> This notion of the physicality of the body and its influence on the mind through the pulses and nervous system plays a crucial part in Shelley's vegetarian politics and utopian desires to reform society.<sup>2</sup> In 'On the Vegetable System of Diet' (1814-15), a variation on the *Vindication*, Shelley observes:

Man is an whole the complicated parts of which are so interwoven with each other, that the most remote and subtle springs of his machine are connected with those which are more gross and obvious, and reciprocally act and react upon each other. The vital principle by some inexplicable process influences, and is influenced [by], the nerves and muscles of the body.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley was interested in the vegetarian theories of Trotter and Joseph Ritson. Joseph Ritson, *An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food: as a Moral Duty* (London 1802). Some parts of Shelley's *Vindication* are almost paraphrases of *An Essay on Abstinence* (Ritson 47-48). See Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Note 17,' *Queen Mab*, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Donald Riman and Neil Fraistat, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004) 295-312 (hereafter this edition is abbreviated as *CPPBS*) and *A Vindication of Natural Diet*, *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. E. B. Murray, corr. ed. (Clarendon Press, 1997) 80 ['Note 17' of *Queen Mab*, 299-300] (hereafter *Vindication*, and this edition is abbreviated as *PWPBS*). All quotations of *Queen Mab* are taken from this edition. For more information about the relations between Shelley and Ritson, see Donald Riman and Neil Fraistat, 'Commentaries,' *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004) 651-52 (hereafter 'Commentaries'); and Timothy Morton, 'Joseph Ritson, Percy Shelley and the Making of Romantic Vegetarianism,' *Romanticism* 12.1 (2006): 52-61. For the relations between Trotter and Shelley see also Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994) 181-82 (hereafter *SRT*).

<sup>2</sup> Shelley comments in his Note 17 to *Queen Mab*, 'The elderly man, whose youth has been poisoned by intemperance, or who has lived with apparent moderation, and is afflicted with a variety of painful maladies, would find his account in a beneficial change produced without the risk of poisonous medicines' ('Note 17' 310; *Vindication* 88). Nora Crook and Derek Guiton remark that, in the *Vindication*, Shelley euphemistically refers to a vegetarian diet as a cure for venereal disease (Crook and Guiton 80). For Shelley and venereal disease, see Crook and Guiton, 14-18, 119-35.

<sup>3</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'On the Vegetable System of Diet,' *PWPBS*, 1: 149. See also Ruston, 'Vegetarianism and Vitality' 120, 126-27.



In exploring this aspect of Shelley's thought, attention should be given to the poet's fascination with Baron d'Holbach's *The System of Nature; Or, of the Moral and Physical World* (*Système de la nature, ou des loix du monde physique et du monde moral* 1770). As Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat note, d'Holbach had an enormous effect on Shelley's *Queen Mab* and the extent of this connection is still yet to be fully explored (Reiman and Fraistat 'Commentary' 503).<sup>4</sup> D'Holbach's principle of '*mens sana in corpore sano*' ('a sound mind in a sound body') is drawn on by Shelley's envisioned reform of society by means of vegetarianism as both a moral and political principle.<sup>5</sup>

A further important aspect of Shelley's vegetarian politics is aesthetics. In *Queen Mab*, the image of the palate is invariably concomitant with *taste*, which is one of the central concepts in eighteenth-century aesthetics. The word *taste* is sometimes interchangeably used with the word *gusto* (in Italian 'taste,' which is derived from the Latin word *gustus*, 'a tasting') to describe palatable feelings, as exemplified by Hazlitt's essay 'On *Gusto*,' in which he defines this term as a 'power and passion' residing in an object of art (4:77). Most recently, in 'Romantic Gastronomy: An Introduction' (2007), Denise Gigante has pointed out that 'Romanticism may be associated with *gusto*, but it

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<sup>4</sup> However, there are some studies which refer to d'Holbach in reading *Queen Mab*. For example, Onno Oerlemans notes these relations between Shelley and d'Holbach's materialism to emphasise Shelley's resistance to pure materialism through his commitment to an eco-oriented vegetarianism. Such a view maintains that humans can 'reconcile the deterministic materialism which allows diet a physical (even metaphysical) importance with the utopianism, so evident in *Queen Mab*.' Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002) 107.

<sup>5</sup> D'Holbach's phrase '*mens sana in corpore sano*' is derived from the Roman poet Juvenal's *Satires* (X 356).

has hardly been recognized.’<sup>6</sup> Gigante emphasises the importance of ‘the critical concerns’ about ‘the nexus of nineteenth-century gastronomy,’ which covers ‘but are hardly limited to, the dietary politics of Romantic writers, including the discourse of vegetarianism [...] and the literary-critical principles of gastronomy as a genre on the margins of nineteenth-century prose [...]’ (Para. 16).

Viewed against this background, Shelley’s treatment of the sense of taste is, in contrast to the poetry of Keats, less often explored.<sup>7</sup> One notable exception is Timothy Morton’s *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste* (1994), which conceives of Shelley’s vegetarianism from an eco-historical point of view.<sup>8</sup> Yet my own concern rests with Shelley’s aesthetics in relation to his political gastronomy or gastro-politics in *Queen*

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<sup>6</sup> Denise Gigante, ‘Romantic Gastronomy: An Introduction,’ *Romantic Gastronomy*, ed. Denise Gigante, *Romantic Circles*, January 2007, 19 February 2011, Para. 1  
[http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gastronomy/gigante/gigante\\_essay.html](http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gastronomy/gigante/gigante_essay.html). For a brief summary of the concept of taste as *gusto* in the age of Romanticism and a French connection with it, see also Denise Gigante, ‘Romanticism and Taste,’ *Literature Compass* 4.2 (2007): 407-19. I shall later come back to Gigante’s discussion of *gusto*.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Gigante deals with a Keats numbed by illness and craving for sensuous taste throughout the *Hyperion* poem, by highlighting the poet’s existential anxieties through the figure of Hyperion. Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005) 153. For other studies of Keats and the concept of taste, see Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford: Oxford 1974) 115-42; Marjorie Levinson ‘Keats and His Readers: A Question of Taste,’ *Subject to History: Ideology, Class, Gender*, ed. David Simpson (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991) 143-62; and Denis Gigante, ‘The Endgame of Taste: Keats, Sartre, Beckett,’ *Cultures of Taste/Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism*, ed. Timothy Morton (London: Palgrave, 2003) 183-201.

<sup>8</sup> Morton’s work takes up Jonathan Bate’s *Romantic Ecology* which has emphasised the importance of the economy of nature rather than those materialistic readings ‘too limited in their view of society.’ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991) 46. Gigante succinctly sums up Morton’s work as an investigation of ‘how Percy Shelley promoted an ideal of “natural” or “pure” diet against the pollutants and cultural corruptions of urban commercial taste.’ Gigante, ‘Romanticism and Taste,’ 415. For Morton’s recent ecocritical discussion of Shelley’s consciousness of ‘history’ and ‘nature’ in his vegetarian thought, which prefigures Marx’s notions of ‘history’ and ‘nature,’ see Timothy Morton, ‘Nature and Culture,’ *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, Morton, 202-05.

*Mab*.<sup>9</sup> In Shelley's political gastronomy, a feeling for the physicality of the stomach and palate emerges as one of the essential components of Shelley's version of *gusto* and even *dis-gusto* ('dis-taste'), a visceral feeling in response to social injustices and inequalities. In other words, this antipathy motivates Shelley to formulate his *dis-gusto* at the gastronomy of the contemporary *gourmet* establishment including the Prince Regent (later George IV), because their exquisite gastronomy inseparable from meat-eating reflects their own politics that Shelley associates with the world of carnivorous animals where the strong prey on the weak. Although Shelley uses neither the term *gusto* nor *dis-gusto* in *Queen Mab*, the antithesis articulates a complex knot including politics, vegetarianism, and aesthetics in Shelley's poem.<sup>10</sup> By focusing on Shelley's gastro-politics as an antidote to the negative-trinity of tyrannical monarchy, commerce, and superstitious religion, we can see how Shelley's poetics of taste, comprised of *gusto* and *dis-gusto*, establish a series of interrelations between natural philosophy and moral philosophy.

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'political gastronomy' (*gastronomie politique*) seems to appear first in Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *The Physiology of Taste* (1825) as a way of political or diplomatic negotiations in the middle of their feast: 'the difference between a hungry man and a man well fed, and know that the table establishes a kind of tie between the two parties to a discussion [...] to receive certain impressions, to submit to certain influences.' Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*, trans. Anne Drayton (1970; London: Penguin 1994) 55, trans. of *La Physiologie du goût: ou Méditations de gastronomie transcendante* (1825; Paris, 1864) 62. By the use of the term 'political gastronomy.' By use of this term in a totally different context of Brillat-Savarin's discussion, I describe Shelley's practice of vegetarianism as a means for social reform on ethical grounds.

<sup>10</sup> In a different manner, Peter Butter identifies the same complex of ideas in Shelley's poetry: 'His best poems are not mere outpourings of emotion, but are efforts to master and understand his experience and to relate his own particular feelings to his general ideas about politics, about morals, about religion' (3).

## 1. The Materiality of the Pulses: Shelley's Reception of d'Holbach's Materialism

### The Attractive and Repulsive Forces Ruled by Necessity: Shelley and Materialism

In his essay 'On Life' (1818), Shelley looks back on his commitment to what he calls 'materialism' with some regret: 'The shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, and its fatal consequences in morals, their violent dogmatism concerning the source of all things, had early conducted me to materialism. This materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds' ('On Life' 506). Based on these observations, Shelley's *Queen Mab* has been labelled by some critics as a materialist poem.<sup>11</sup> *Queen Mab* is obviously written under the influence of the French *philosophes* and materialists who wrote in the tradition of Lucretius and Spinoza—such as Claude-Adrien Helvétius, Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis and d'Holbach.<sup>12</sup> D'Holbach's influence on *Queen Mab* is an indispensable clue for illuminating the connection between Shelley's aesthetics and politics in conjunction with Shelley's concept of taste and vegetarianism.

Shelley's materialistic portrayal of the relationship between the human body and soul is shaped by *The System of Nature*. In fact, Shelley cites long passages from this book in 'Note 11' (2: 257-58) and 'Note 13' (2: 269-76). This influence is evident when Shelley quotes a couple of paragraphs in 'Note 11' from Chapter IV, 'Of the Laws of

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<sup>11</sup> For example, see Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974; London: Penguin, 1987) 153 and also *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (2008; London, Harper, 2009) 344.

<sup>12</sup> For a general study of Lucretius's influence on Shelley's poetry including *Queen Mab*, see Paul Turner, 'Shelley and Lucretius,' *The Review of English Studies* [New Series] 10.39 (1959): 269-82

Motion Common to All the Beings of Nature—Of Attraction and Repulsion—Of Inert Force—Of Necessity’ (1: 27-33 [1: 36-48]). Significantly, the following passage from d’Holbach resonates with *Queen Mab*:

The primitive beings, or elements of bodies, have need of support, of props, that is to say, of the presence of each other, for the purpose of preserving themselves; of acquiring consistence or solidity; a truth which applies with equal uniformity to what is called *physical*, as to what is termed *moral*.

It is upon this disposition in matter and bodies with relation to each other, that is founded those modes of action which natural philosophers designate by the terms *attraction*, *repulsion*, *sympathy*, *antipathy*, *affinities*, *relations*. Moralists describe this disposition [and the affect it produces] under the names of *love*, *hatred*, *friendship*, *aversion*. Man, like all the beings in nature, experiences the impulse of attraction and repulsion; the motion excited in him differing from that of other beings, only because it is more concealed, and frequently so hidden, that neither the causes which excite it, nor their mode of action are known.<sup>13</sup>

D’Holbach assumes that the two kinds of philosophy, moral philosophy and natural philosophy, both operate in the human body according to the actions of ‘attraction’ and ‘repulsion.’<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, Shelley emphasises this interrelation between the moral and physical elements of the human body in relation to the notion of discipline in

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<sup>13</sup> Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d’Holbach, *The System of Nature; Or, of the Moral and Physical World*, trans. H. D. Robinson, 2 vols. (London, 1835) 1: 29. trans. of *Système de la nature, ou des lois du monde physique et du monde moral* (London [Londres], 1781) 1: 40. The original French text is taken from the 1781 edition that Shelley was reading. I place all the page numbers of this edition in square brackets.

<sup>14</sup> H. W. Piper’s *The Active Universe* succinctly explains the essence of d’Holbach’s view of the universe: ‘all action, on whatever atomic scale, is prompted by the internal properties of matter responding to “attraction and repulsion, sympathy and antipathy, affinity or relationship, and, in men, love or hate.”’ H. W. Piper, *The Active Universe* (London: Athlone, 1962) 20-21. See also Reiman’s and Fraistat’s commentary for II 231-43 (‘Commentaries’ 541n). Later on, Shelley, in describing his (inter)personal relationships, employs the same image of ‘[a]lternating attraction and repulsion’ (370) in *Epipsychidion*.

*Queen Mab*: ‘There is no great extravagance in presuming that the progress of the perpendicularity of the poles may be as rapid as the progress of intellect; or that there should be a perfect identity between the moral and physical improvement of the human species’ (‘Note 10’ 256).<sup>15</sup>

In this worldview of moral and natural philosophy, the universe is powered by the perpetual pendulum swinging between attraction and repulsion, which is the ultimate cause of the world or ‘*nécessité universelle*.’ The dynamics are identified with the physical laws of nature in a similar way to Newton’s theory of universal gravitation.

D’Holbach postulates the following on the relations between necessity and nature:

This irresistible power, this universal necessity, this general energy, is, then, only a consequence of the nature of things, by virtue of which every thing acts without intermission, after constant and immutable laws; these laws not varying more for the whole, than for the beings of which it is composed. Nature is an active, living whole, whose parts necessarily concur, and that without their own knowledge, to maintain activity, life, and existence. Nature acts and exists necessarily: all that she contains necessarily conspires to perpetuate her active existence. (1: 33 [1: 47])

For d’Holbach, every action and movement in nature is an effect of the operation of necessity. Necessity rules and unifies all physical laws in nature as ‘a living whole’ and the final cause of all moral actions and thought. To further elucidate the power of

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<sup>15</sup> This passage shows the influence of Cabanis’s *Rapports du physique et du moral de l’homme* (On the relations between the physical and moral aspects of man, 1802). Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l’homme*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1802), 406. Shelley ordered the ‘Ouvres de Cabanis medecin’ on the 17th Dec 1812 (*LPBS* 1: 342). On the Shelley-Cabanis connection, see Carl Grabo, *A Newton among Poets: Shelley’s Use of Science in Prometheus Unbound* (1930; New York: Cooper, 1968) 25-27; Israel James Kapstein, ‘Shelley and Cabanis,’ *PMLA* 52.1 (1937): 238-43; Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* 16-19; Seamus Deane, *The French Revolution and Enlightenment in England 1789-1832* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988) 95-129.

Necessity associated with Newtonian physics, d'Holbach introduces the conception of self-conservation or self-preservation in the following passage:

Natural philosophers call this direction, or tendency [of conservation], *self-gravitation*. Newton calls it *inert force*. Moralists denominate it, in man, *self-love*; which is nothing more than the tendency he has to preserve himself—a desire of happiness—a love of his own welfare—a wish for pleasure—a promptitude in seizing on every thing that appears favourable to his conservation—a marked aversion to all that either disturbs his happiness, or menaces his existence—primitive sentiments common to all beings of the human species, which all their faculties are continually striving to satisfy; which all their passions, their wills, their actions, have eternally for their object and their end. This self-gravitation, then, is clearly a necessary disposition in man and in all other beings, which, by a variety of means, contributes to the preservation of the existence they have received as long as nothing deranges the order of their machine or its primitive tendency.

(1: 31 [1: 43])

D'Holbach explains Newton's theory of '*inert force*' as '*self-gravitation*' in order to articulate the idea of '*self-love*.' This moral philosophical concept of '*self-love*,' for human beings, brings together a desire to pursue their own happiness in many ways as well as an 'aversion' to others who hinder the pursuit of their individual desires.

In d'Holbach's pure materialistic view, both '*self-love*' and 'aversion' to others are rooted in a more fundamental opposition between attraction and repulsion. Shelley, in fact, assimilates into *Queen Mab* d'Holbach's cosmology in the name of 'Eternal nature's law' (II 76). In addition, Shelley's 'Note 12' discusses this moral-philosophical connection in relation to 'Necessity':

He who asserts the doctrine of Necessity, means that contemplating the

events which compose the moral and material universe, he beholds only an immense and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects, no one of which could occupy any other place than it does occupy, or acts in any other place than it does act. (*CPPBS* 2: 261)

In fact, Shelley's ideas of 'self-gravitation' and 'self-love' are influenced by Newton's law of gravity (via d'Holbach). In the following lines of *Queen Mab*, body and soul are under the control of the opposition between attraction and repulsion:

Throughout this varied and eternal world  
Soul is the only element, the block  
That for uncounted ages has remained  
The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight  
Is active, living spirit. Every grain  
Is sentient both in unity and part,  
And the minutest atom comprehends  
A world of loves and hatreds; these beget  
Evil and good: hence truth and falsehood spring;  
Hence will and thought and action, all the germs  
Of pain or pleasure, sympathy or hate,  
That variegate the eternal universe. (IV 139-50)

Such pairings of 'unity and part' (144), 'loves and hatreds' (146), 'Evil and good' (148), 'pain or pleasure,' and 'sympathy or hate' (149) suggest that this world is constituted by those attractive and repulsive forces traversing the two realms of moral and natural philosophy. 'Necessity,' which introduces Newtonian theories of gravity and motion, rules this 'eternal world' (139) as the central and motive force. These alternating forces of attraction and repulsion thus control human 'thought and [nervous] action' (148), as this interaction consequently generates the pairings 'pain and pleasure' and 'sympathy'



and ‘hate’ (149).<sup>16</sup> For this reason, these lines reinforce the material aspects of the human body in this ‘world of loves and hatreds’ (146). This ‘doctrine of Necessity,’ with its dichotomised pairing of attraction (or ‘self-gravitation’) and repulsion, re-emerges in his later prose fiction ‘The Coliseum’ (1818), which is discussed in Chapter IV.<sup>17</sup>

### **The ‘Sprit of Nature’: Between Materialism and Immaterialism**

Even though Shelley was deeply influenced by d’Holbach, it is not true that Shelley merely adhered to d’Holbach’s philosophy in composing *Queen Mab*. Shelley was acquainted with the French materialists (and the French *philosophes*), but the subtlety of Shelley’s thought about materialism and atheism defies easy categorisation. One has to be measured in judging Shelley as a materialist, because Shelley’s quasi-materialism is essentially different from today’s scientific materialism and atheism. This observation goes some way to explaining how Shelley was equally fascinated by pre-Socratic philosophy and Platonism.<sup>18</sup> For example, Pythagorean thought combined with materialism is found in *Queen Mab*: ‘There’s not one atom of yon earth / But once

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<sup>16</sup> In *The System of Nature*, there is a passage which reads: ‘man is not more a free agent to think than to act’ (1: 88).

<sup>17</sup> Another source of this opposition between ‘attraction’ and ‘repulsion’ could be the concept of ‘affinitive attraction’ explained in *A System of Familiar Philosophy* written by Adam Walker, whose lectures fascinated Shelley at Syon House and Eton. Adam Walker, *A System of Familiar Philosophy: In Twelve Lectures*, vol. 1 (London: 1802) 153-60. Walker also discusses Newton and the law of gravity (77-78).

<sup>18</sup> In the ‘necessitarianism’ of *Queen Mab*, Paul Hamilton sees a tinge of ‘the Platonic meaning of necessity, which, in the *Timaeus*, lies closer to arbitrariness than determinism’ as well as d’Holbach’s own. Paul Hamilton, ‘Literature and Philosophy,’ *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, Morton, 172-73.

was living man' (II 211).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Shelley's idea of the 'Spirit of Nature' (I 264) or 'Soul of the Universe' (VI 190) resembles Platonic idealism, as illustrated in the lines: 'Hath Nature's soul, / That formed this world so beautiful, that spread / Earth's lap with plenty' (IV 89-91).<sup>20</sup> Such a notion was already found in Shelley's letter to William Godwin on 29th July 1812:

I have read La Systeme de la Nature. [...] In fact, the doctrine which affirms that there is no such thing as matter, & that which affirms that all is matter appear to me, perfectly indifferent in the question between benevolence & self love. I cannot see how they interfere with each other, or why the two doctrines of materialism & disinterestedness cannot be held in one mind, as independently of each other, as the two truths that a cricket ball is round, and a box square. (LPBS 1: 315-16)<sup>21</sup>

This letter evinces Shelley's own stance towards materialism and immaterialism at this time. Whether Shelley successfully synthesises this opposition or not is debateable.

What is clear, however, is that *Queen Mab* cannot be read straightforwardly as an extreme expression either of a materialist or immaterialist position. Similar ambivalent

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<sup>19</sup> In addition to these philosophers, Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest also point out an echo of Erasmus Darwin's *Temple of Nature* (POS 1: 287n [II 211-15]).

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth Neill Cameron identifies 'Nature's soul' with Necessity. See Kenneth Neill Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (1950; London: Victor, 1951) 256.

<sup>21</sup> Also in a letter on 3rd June 1812, Shelley writes that 'I have just finished reading La Systeme de la Nature par M. Mirabaud [*sic*]. Do you know the real author,—it appears to me a work of uncommon powers' (LPBS 1: 303). In another letter dated on 18th August 1812, Shelley writes that he was planning to translate this work into English (1:325). Ross Greig Woodman has shown that *Queen Mab* is an imaginative composite of d'Holbach's materialism, William Godwin's immaterialism, and the Orphic mysticism of Thomas Taylor and John Frank Newton. See Ross Greig Woodman, *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1964) 75-87. With respect to immaterialistic and mystical influence on the young Shelley, Morton refers to Neo-Platonism and Pythagorean thought. See Morton, *SRT* 91-92. A few other studies investigate the material aspects in *Queen Mab* from different perspectives. For textual criticism concerned with his production of 'materials pages,' see Neil Fraistat, 'The Material Shelley: Who Gets the Finger in *Queen Mab*?,' *Wordsworth Circle* 33.1 (2002): 33-36. Mark S. Lussier discusses Shelley's 'poetics of physicality' with reference to some lines from *Queen Mab*. See Mark S. Lussier, *Romantic Dynamics: The Poetics of Physicality* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999) 136-64.

feelings are reflected in the passage about Newton and atheism in 'Note 13' of *Queen Mab*:

The consistent Newtonian is necessarily an atheist. See *Sir William Drummond's Academical Questions*, chap. iii.—Sir W. seems to consider the atheism to which it leads, as a sufficient presumption of the falsehood of the system of gravitation: but surely it is more consistent with the good faith of philosophy to admit a deduction from facts than an hypothesis incapable of proof, although it might militate with the obstinate preconceptions of the mob. Had this author, instead of inveighing against the guilt and absurdity of atheism, demonstrated its falsehood, his conduct would have been more suited to the modesty of the sceptic and the toleration of the philosopher. (*CPPBS* 2: 277)

Shelley seems to side neither with atheism nor Drummondian idealism. At the same time, Shelley sympathises with both sceptical and idealist sides of the debate. Central to Shelley's *Queen Mab* and this passage is the idea of the soul considered as 'the only element' (IV 138) and ultimate source of this universe. The word 'only' has a substantial effect. On one level, 'only' implies a singularity or uniqueness of each soul and body as micro-cosmos in the universe as a macro-cosmos. But, at another level, every single soul is 'only' a part of the 'Spirit of Nature' (*anima mundi*), or, as Shelley puts it, 'Every grain / Is sentient both in unity and part' (IV 143-44) and 'the minutest atom comprehends / A world of loves and hatreds' (IV 145-46). This cosmological structure built on the interrelations between the micro-cosmos and macro-cosmos resembles Blake's mystical cosmology in 'Auguries of Innocence':

To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour. (1-5)<sup>22</sup>

Blake collapses the distinction between the particular and the universal, so that the human imagination can see ‘a World in a Grain of Sand.’ (1). In a similar manner, the human soul reveals the soul of the infinite universe in *Queen Mab*. An individual soul is only a part of the greater soul and, by the same token, each soul is connected with ‘the eternal universe’ (IV 150) through mental and physical sensibility (‘thought and action’). Shelley’s understanding of soul is not purely materialistic.

In contrast to Shelley’s *Queen Mab*, in d’Holbach’s *System of Nature*, the concept of soul is less mystical, or rather purely materialistic, as discussed in Chapter VII ‘Of the Soul, and of the Spiritual System’ of *The System of Nature* (1: 47-53 [1: 76-88]). D’Holbach explains the function of the human soul, by focusing on the relations between ‘spirit’ or ‘soul’ and ‘our senses,’ as well as the physical or physiological connection between the ‘motive-power’ and ‘action’ through ‘material organs.’ This idea influenced Shelley, to some extent, as he writes in a note that: ‘The senses are the source of all knowledge to the mind; consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent’ (‘Note 13’ 246). D’Holbach suggests that the ‘motion’ of the ‘senses’ is produced by ‘matter’:

matter alone is capable of acting on our senses, and without this action nothing would be capable of making itself known to us [...]. That which is called our soul, moves itself with us; now motion is a property of

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<sup>22</sup> William Blake, ‘Auguries of Innocence,’ *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, Forward and Commentary Harold Bloom, 2nd ed. (1982; Berkeley: U of California P, 2008) 493-96.

matter—this soul gives impulse to the arm; the arm, moved by it, makes an impression, a blow, that follows the general law of motion: in this case, the force remaining the same, if the mass was twofold, the blow would be double. This soul again evinces its materiality in the invincible obstacles it encounters on the part of the body. (1: 48-49 [1: 78])

If the ‘soul’ is material in substance rather than spiritual, then the function of the ‘soul’ as the cause of bodily motion is taken over by that of the ‘brain’ and ‘nerves,’ both of which convey human ‘feeling’ via the ‘*facultés intellectuelles*’:

Those who have distinguished the soul from the body, appear only to have distinguished their brain from themselves. Indeed, the brain is the common centre where all the nerves, distributed through every part of the body, meet and blend themselves: it is by the aid of this interior organ that all those operations are performed which are attributed to the soul: it is the impulse, the motion, communicated to the nerve, which modifies the brain: in consequence, it reacts, and gives play to the bodily organs, or rather it acts upon itself, and becomes capable of producing within itself a great variety of motion, which has been designated *intellectual faculties*. (1: 52 [1:86])

This explanation relentlessly denies both a metaphysical and theological structure of ‘the soul’ as a purely spiritual entity, even though still affirming the existence of ‘the soul’ in the form of mind or ‘*intellectual faculties*’ as the source of emotions and ‘the passions [which] are modes of existence or modifications of the brain [or the interior organ], which either attract or repel those objects by which man is surrounded; that consequently they are submitted in their action to the physical laws of attraction and repulsion’ (1:59 [1:100]). In such a manner, d’Holbach’s materialist philosophy denies the independence of ‘the soul’ from ‘the body,’ confidently asserting that ‘the interior organ of man, which is called his *soul*, is purely material’ (1: 75-76 [1: 134]). Of course,

this material ‘soul’ or mind is, through the function of nerves, under the rule of ‘the physical laws of attraction and repulsion.’

In this sense, d’Holbach’s arguments on the human soul and feelings are mirrored, and refracted, in *Queen Mab* through Shelley’s use of Romance as a poetic genre. The soul is, in *Queen Mab*, by no means entirely material, and the narrator never denies the presence of soul or supernatural powers. The poem sets out with a peculiar mixture of material and immaterial imagery:

Hath then the gloomy Power  
Whose reign is in the tainted sepulchres  
Seized on her sinless soul?  
Must then that peerless form  
Which love and admiration cannot view  
Without a beating heart, those azure veins  
Which steal like streams along a field of snow,  
That lovely outline, which is fair  
As breathing marble, perish?  
Must putrefaction’s breath  
Leave nothing of this heavenly sight  
But loathsomeness and ruin?  
Spare nothing but a gloomy theme,  
On which the lightest heart might moralize?  
Or is it only a sweet slumber  
Stealing o’er sensation,  
Which the breath of roseate morning  
Chaseth into darkness? (I 9-26)

Clearly, there is an intrinsic dichotomy between the ‘soul’ (11) and ‘form [or body]’ (12), which consists of ‘a beating heart, those azure veins’ (14) and ‘sensation’ (I 24). In

this sense, this materialistic aspect of *Queen Mab* is still associated with somatic sensations rather than rigorous scrutiny or denial of supernatural phenomena. In the next Canto, having been visited by the Fairy Queen Mab, the soul of Ianthe (the heroine-maid modelled on Harriet Westbrook, Shelley's first wife) is taken on a journey through the human and supernatural world by an ethereal chariot. Mab instructs Ianthe's soul:

I tell thee that those viewless beings,  
Whose mansion is the smallest particle  
Of the impassive atmosphere,  
Think, feel and live like man;  
That their affections and antipathies,  
Like his, produce the laws  
Ruling their moral state;  
And the minutest throb  
That through their frame diffuses  
The slightest, faintest motion,  
Is fixed and indispensable  
As the majestic laws  
That rule yon rolling orbs. (II 231-43)

Sensation and feeling are present even in these 'minute' beings, all of which feel 'affections and antipathies' (235) produced through the workings of physical sensations as 'the minute throb / That through their frame diffuses / The slightest, faintest motion' (238-40). Just as the words 'affections and antipathies' imply the law of attraction and repulsion (echoing d'Holbach), so their nervous system is interconnected with 'the majestic laws' of the universe.

With respect to Nature's economy depicted in *Queen Mab*, those minute and 'viewless' lives have their own part to play in 'the majestic laws' (II 242) of nature. These depictions of the sensations introduce the 'Spirit of Nature.' This cosmology of organic interconnection is described at the end of Canto I:

Yet not the lightest leaf  
That quivers to the passing breeze  
Is less instinct with thee:  
Yet not the meanest worm  
That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead  
Less shares thy eternal breath.  
Sprit of Nature! thou!  
Imperishable as this scene,  
Here is thy fitting temple. (I 269-277)

The narrator expresses the ideas of body and soul, life and death, and time and eternity, through the wind-swept 'leaf' (269) and the minute 'worm' on the breathless and decaying 'dead' (274), both of which share in the 'eternal breath' (274) of the 'Spirit of Nature' (275). These creatures and plants are, in this sense, incorporated within the larger economy of nature. Shortly before writing *Queen Mab*, Shelley expresses to Elizabeth Hitchener a resonant world view in a letter of 24th November 1811:

I will say then, that all nature is animated, that microscopic [*sic*] vision as it hath discovered to us millions of animated beings whose pursuits and passions are as eagerly followed as our own, so might it if extended find that Nature itself was but a mass of organized animation;—*perhaps* the animative intellect of all this is in a constant rotation of change [...].

(1:192)<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> I will return to discuss this organic system of Nature in Chapter V.



This idea is a variation on Spinoza's pantheism and also resonates with Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man*. Shelley quotes Pope's concept of the great chain of being (this concept was a part of a larger discourse of a *great chain of being* popularised in eighteenth-century Europe) in a letter to his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg (3. Jan. 1811): 'all are but parts of one tremendous whole' (*LPBS* 1: 35).<sup>24</sup> In *Queen Mab* Shelley transforms Pope's cosmology into his own version of the great chain of being:

How wonderful! that even  
The passions, prejudices, interests,  
That sway the meanest being, the weak touch  
That moves the finest nerve,  
And in one human brain  
Causes the faintest thought, becomes a link  
In the great chain of nature. (II 102-08)

This passage suggests that 'a link / In the great chain of nature' (107-08) is felt only through the nervous system of the body, especially that of the 'human brain' (106). In this way, the physical relations between the material body and immaterial soul are one of the most central concepts to permeate *Queen Mab*.

## **2. *Mens Sana in Corpore Sano: Gusto and Dis-gusto* in Shelley's Gastro-politics**

### **Taste and (*Dis-*)*Gusto***

There is a detailed account of the interaction between the power of sensibility and the brain in Chapter VIII of d'Holbach's *The System of Nature*, 'Of the Intellectual

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<sup>24</sup> In *An Essay on Man*, the correct word is not 'tremendous,' but 'stupendous.' See also Morton, *SRT* 90-93.

Faculties; they are all derived from the Faculty of Feeling' (1: 53-59 [1: 88-101]), which shares an affinity with Shelley's depiction of the 'human brain' and 'nerve[s]' as an essential transmitter of 'the faintest thought' in *Queen Mab* (II 105-07). D'Holbach identifies the human '*feeling*' with '*gravity, magnetism, elasticity, electricity*' (1: 53 [1: 88-89]). This 'feeling' spreads throughout the body as one 'great nerve,' in which 'the nerves unite and loose themselves in the brain' (1: 54 [1: 89]).<sup>25</sup> So the brain is literally the headquarters of the human body and nervous system: 'man ceases to feel in those parts of his body of which the communication with the brain is intercepted; he feels very little, or not at all, whenever this organ is itself deranged or affected in too lively a manner' (1: 54 [1: 89]).

D'Holbach focuses on physical sensitivity in order strictly to define the concept of sensibility as a psychological action, which is, for d'Holbach, connected tightly with the concepts of '*Sensation, perception, [and] idea*' (1: 56 [1: 94]). These concepts are necessarily at work in the operation of the senses under the control of the brain, producing those complex concepts such as 'wit, sensibility, imagination, [and] taste':

It is the extreme mobility of which man is capable, owing to his peculiar organization, which distinguishes him from other beings that are called insensible or inanimate: and the different degrees of this mobility of which the individuals of his species are susceptible, discriminate them from each other, making that incredible variety and that infinity of difference which is to be found, as well in their corporeal faculties as in those which are mental or intellectual. From this mobility, more or less remarkable in each human being, results, wit, sensibility, imagination, taste, &c. [...].

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<sup>25</sup> Here the word 'loose' could be alternatively translated as 'lose' ('*se perdre*').

In this materialistic view, everything present in the human mind is caused by ‘the shock given to the organs’ by virtue of physical stimuli. The mind cannot work at all without the physical stimuli to the ‘corporeal faculties,’ which underlines the importance of ‘mobility’ in the human mind and body. In short, emotion is identical to motion, as discussed in Shelley’s *A Treatise on Morals (Speculations on Metaphysics, c. 1815)*, written a couple of years after *Queen Mab*.<sup>27</sup> Thus the human ‘sensibility’ is distinct from mere physical sensations or perceptions, as it has the capacity to develop a more culturally and aesthetically sophisticated experience and judgement as embodied by the term ‘taste.’

Both in d’Holbach’s *The System of Nature* and Shelley’s *Queen Mab*, moral philosophy and natural philosophy are entwined with each other and operate within the same realm, through the dynamics of attraction and repulsion, ruled by necessity. The concept of taste is a manifestation of this cosmological structure. For example, d’Holbach introduces two kinds of taste, physical and moral. The former is taste as a physical sensation:

The mouth, filled with nervous, sensible, moveable, and irritable glands, saturated with juices suitable to the dissolution of saline substances, is affected in a very lively manner by the aliments which pass through it; these glands transmit to the brain the impressions received: it is from this mechanism that results *taste*. (1: 56-57 [1: 95-96])

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<sup>26</sup> Shelley may import this argument into *A Refutation of Deism* (1814) in Eusebes’s speech to Theosophus. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Refutation of Deism*, PWPBS 1: 116.

<sup>27</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Treatise on Morals (A Fragment)*, *Shelley’s Prose; or The Trumpet of A Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark (1954; New York: New Amsterdam, 1988) 184 (hereafter this edition is abbreviated as *SP*). For a further elaboration of this argument, see Chapter 3.

These workings of physical taste through the brain and nerves are concomitant with aesthetic taste in moral philosophy, especially as d'Holbach explains another function of taste and its relation to the faculty of judgement in his discussion of human judgement. D'Holbach goes even further by telling us that 'taste in fine art' is not an intrinsic power, but an entirely empirical one acquired through the force of perception and sensation. Moreover, even the feeling of dislike and hatred is learnt through experience:

What is called *taste* in the fine arts, is to be attributed, in the same manner, only to the acuteness of man's organs practised by the habit of seeing, of comparing, and of judging certain objects: from whence results, to some of his species, the faculty of judging with great rapidity, or in the twinkling of an eye, the whole with its various relations. It is by the force of seeing, of feeling, of experiencing objects, that he attains to a knowledge of them; it is in consequence of reiterating this experience, that he acquires the power and the habit of judging with celerity. But this experience is by no means *innate*, for he did not possess it before he was born; he is neither able to think, to judge, nor to have ideas, before he has feeling; he is neither in a capacity to love nor to hate; to approve nor to blame, before he has been moved either agreeably or disagreeably. (1: 83 [1:149-50])

To delve more deeply into the idea of Shelley's concept of taste (liking) and disgust (dislike) in their relation to the politics of *Queen Mab*, let us briefly examine the British empirical tradition of aesthetics in the eighteenth century, in which the concept of *taste* is particularly associated with morality and politics. As seen in the case of d'Holbach, since the beginning of the eighteenth century around Europe, the term *taste* has been considered a concept which harbours both a material and immaterial

meaning—namely, the physical act of tasting, which is metaphysical when it has to do with abstract beauty.<sup>28</sup> According to the *OED*, one of the earliest examples of the usage of the term *taste* as a metaphorical appreciation of someone's aesthetic ability to discern the beautiful in an object, is found in Milton's *Paradise Regained*, where 'Sion's songs, to all true tastes excelling / Where God is praised aright' (IV 347-48).<sup>29</sup> Adam's tasting of the fruit of knowledge suggests how *taste* and knowledge are inseparable from each other.<sup>30</sup>

*Taste* was often used by eighteenth-century men of letters to signify an aesthetic judgement. As one of the earliest examples of this usage of taste, Joseph Addison employs the metaphor of *taste* for good writing style in *The Spectator*.<sup>31</sup> To describe the concept of aesthetic judgement operated by the 'intellectual faculty,' Addison uses the word 'taste,' in its original meaning to refer to the physical function of the tongue and the palate, by employing the figure of a tea connoisseur who, 'after having tasted ten different kinds of tea, [...] would distinguish, without seeing the colour of it, the

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<sup>28</sup> Jocelyne Kolb offers a brief description and discussion of the literal and figurative meaning of what she calls 'ambiguous taste' in British, German and French Romanticism. Jocelyne Kolb, *The Ambiguity of Taste: Freedom and Food in European Romanticism* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995). For the tradition of taste in eighteenth century British aesthetics and philosophy, see R. L. Brett, 'The Aesthetic Sense and Taste in the Literary Criticism of the Early Eighteenth Century,' *The Review of English Studies* 20.79 (1944): 199-213. Peter Kivy deftly summarises this trend at the time. Peter Kivy, 'Recent Scholarship and the British Tradition: A Logic of Taste—The First Fifty Years,' *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. George Dickie and R. J. Sclafani (New York: St Martin's, 1977) 626-42. For a good summary of such associationists as Hume, Hartley, Lord Kames Alexander Gerard, and their theories of imagination (including the theory of taste) in the eighteenth century, see Martin Kallich, *Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth Century England: A History of a Psychological Mind in English Criticism* (Hague: Mouton, 1970) 133-216.

<sup>29</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Regained, The Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Cary, 2nd ed. (1997; Harlow: Pearson, 2007) 499.

<sup>30</sup> For a full account of Milton as an early aesthetic theorist, see Gigante, *Taste* 22-46.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Addison, 'Taste and the Pleasures of the Imagination: 409 Thursday June 19 1712,' *The Spectator*, 3: 527-31.

particular sort which was offered him' (172). To articulate 'the great resemblance between mental and bodily taste,' David Hume, like Addison, uses Sancho Panza's speech on his two kinsmen, who were capable of discerning the subtle taste of old vintage wine.<sup>32</sup> Although Hume uses the gustatory metaphor for describing *taste* as judgement, he appreciates this 'delicacy of sentiment' as more than just a mere appetite: 'When a man is possessed of that talent, he is more happy by what pleases his taste, than by what gratifies his appetites, and receives more enjoyment from a poem, or a piece of reasoning, than the most expensive luxury can afford.'<sup>33</sup> The faculty of *taste* as judgement is, therefore, valuable in that the person who possesses it can enjoy his or her life more. However, this ability is not exclusive to the discerning connoisseur. As d'Holbach states earlier (1:83), Hume, too, believes that the faculty of *taste* is empirically acquired, rather than purely innate, so the delicacy of *taste* can be educated and cultivated through 'practice' to discern 'beauties' and 'defects' in the object they perceive ('Of the Standard of Taste' 143-44). Aesthetic *taste* is acquired through education.

In a similar vein to Hume's ideas, Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) discusses on acquired *taste* or 'relish' (such as the enjoyment of smoking or opium taking) and yet in the case of Burke, aesthetic taste always entails political or ideological elements.<sup>34</sup> Hazlitt, who, in

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<sup>32</sup> David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste,' *Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar (1993; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 140.

<sup>33</sup> David Hume, 'Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion,' *Selected Essays*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Edmund Burke, 'Introduction on Taste,' *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (1990; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 16. For

spite of admitting his literary talent, opposed Burke's conservatism, established his own aesthetics.<sup>35</sup> Hazlitt's concept of *gusto* is, strictly speaking, limited to 'power and passion' expressed in artistic objects rather than taste, a delicacy or sensitivity in evaluating all kinds of arts (Hazlitt 77).<sup>36</sup> David Bromwich defines Hazlitt's *gusto* as 'a quality belonging to a picture, as much as to its creator and appreciator.'<sup>37</sup> Despite the fact that *gusto* and *taste* (as well as the word *delicacy*) are metaphorical terms derived from the physical experience of the palate, there is still a subtle difference between *taste* and *gusto*. In *Romantic Gastronomy*, Gigante elucidates the difference between the eighteenth-century 'Man of Taste' and the Romantic:

Addison had compared the art connoisseur to a consumer of tea with a superbly refined palate, able to discern among several different blends, but Hazlitt takes the analogy further. Far from the disinterested attitude of the Enlightenment critic, who would strive to discern particular 'beauties' or 'defects' in the aesthetic object of contemplation in order to pronounce definitive taste judgments, the Romantic 'Man of Taste' calls the full range of his faculties and senses into play. In the experience of *gusto*, 'the

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the ideological aspect of Burke's aesthetic education, see Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 12. With regard to aesthetic education in the Enlightenment, Eagleton, similarly, argues that Kant's '*sensus communis* is ideology purified, universalised and rendered reflective, ideology raised to the second power, idealized beyond all mere sectarian prejudice or customary reflex to resemble the very ghostly shape of rationality itself.' Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 96.

<sup>35</sup> See also William Hazlitt, 'Character of Mr Burke (1807),' 7:301-13. For the relationship between Hazlitt's aesthetics and his notion of sympathetic imagination as political power, especially found in his response to Burke and Coleridge as political conservatives, see John Whale, *Imagination under Pressure, 1789-1832: Aesthetics, Politics and Utility* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 110-39.

<sup>36</sup> *Queen Mab* was, of course, written before Hazlitt's essay. Yet even before Hazlitt, the word *gusto* was used interchangeably with the word *taste* by Dryden, Pope, Shaftesbury, and Sterne. The *OED* instructs that the word *gusto* in the sense of 'keen relish or enjoyment displayed in speech or action; zest' became common at the beginning of the nineteenth century ('*gusto*' 2). For this reason, Shelley's aesthetic notion of the palate, despite the fact that he never employs the exact word *gusto*, anticipates Hazlitt's 'On *Gusto*,' sharing the same idea in his insistence on the importance of passion in art.

<sup>37</sup> David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (1983; New Haven: Yale UP, 1999) 229.

impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another' (4:78).

(Para. 2)

Gigante astutely indicates that in making an aesthetic judgement to discern particular 'beauties' or 'defects' in the aesthetic object, 'the Romantic "Man of Taste" calls the full range of his faculties and senses into play.' The concept of *taste* or *gusto* in the age of Romanticism entails physical sensations of pleasure and displeasure to a higher extent than 'the disinterested attitude of the Enlightenment critic.' The Romantic man of *taste* is, therefore, sensitive not only to pleasant beauties, but also to unpleasant defects, so that the difference between *taste* and *gusto* depends on the extent to which pleasure and displeasure of sensation is entailed.

Yet, what Gigante calls 'the disinterested attitude of the Enlightenment critic' does not entirely deny any kind of pleasure in its aesthetic judgement. Carolyn Korsmeyer, another contributor to Gigante's *Romantic Gastronomy*, succinctly captures this kind of pleasure and displeasure in the empirical aesthetics of the eighteenth century:

taste is a sense that nearly always has a value valence—that is, one either likes or dislikes what is tasted [...]. Because modern philosophy widely associates beauty with pleasure—indeed according to the most influential theories, such as the empiricism of Hume and Kant's analysis of feeling, beauty is actually identical with a certain type of pleasure—the likes and dislikes that eating typically occasions are parallel to the pleasure-displeasure responses that characterize aesthetic evaluations.<sup>38</sup>

In Shelley's *Queen Mab*, the opposition between 'likes' and 'dislikes' functions as an obvious variation on the dynamics of attraction and repulsion derived from d'Holbach's

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<sup>38</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, 'Tastes and Pleasures,' *Romantic Gastronomies*. ed. Denise Gigante, *Romantic Circles*, January 2007, Para. 12. 01 March 2011  
<[http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gastronomy/korsmeyer/korsmeyer\\_essay.html](http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gastronomy/korsmeyer/korsmeyer_essay.html)>.



*The System of Nature*. The pairing of love and hate (or ‘the pleasure-displeasure’ functions) for Shelley, are the overriding principles of this universe. As seen in d’Holbach’s and Hume’s argument, this interaction between attraction and repulsion operates both through mental and physical sensibility.

To highlight the physical impressions of aesthetic sensibility as *taste*, it is essential to take a look—as Korsmeyer suggests—at Kant’s theory of taste and disgust in *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790), which underscores Shelley’s own ideas of *gusto* and disgust. As a matter of fact, Shelley refers to Kant’s books in his letters and, around the time when he was composing *Queen Mab*, the name Kant appears twice in Shelley’s correspondence.<sup>39</sup> When juxtaposing Shelley’s and Kant’s notion of *taste*, it is particularly pertinent to consider Kant’s remark on displeasure or disgust, in section 48 of his *Critique of Judgement*. Kant expounds to what extent fine art is capable of beautifully depicting such ugly and displeasing elements as the ‘Furies, diseases, devastations of war and the like.’<sup>40</sup> According to Kant, disgust cannot be represented as a natural object ‘without destroying all aesthetic delight, and consequently artistic beauty, namely, that which excites *disgust* [*Ekel*]’ (141 [199]). Kant elucidates this mechanism of disgust:

For, as in this strange sensation [*disgust*], which depends purely on the imagination, the object is represented as insisting, as it were, upon our

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<sup>39</sup> Shelley comments in a letter to Thomas Hookham (on 26 January 1813) that: ‘I certainly wish to have all Kants [*sic*] works’ (*LPBS* 1: 350).

<sup>40</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith, rev. and ed. Nicholas Walker, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 141, trans. of *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. When I quote the original text alongside the translation (including page numbers in square brackets), all quotations are from the following text. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* ed. Heiner F. Klemmer (Humburg: Felix Meiner, 2001) 199.

enjoying it, while we violently resist it, the artificial representation of the object is no longer distinguishable from the nature of the object itself in our sensation, and so it cannot possibly be regarded as beautiful.

(141 [199-200])

Although this passage's complex argument requires explanation, at least it is clear that the concept of disgust is inextricable from the imagination of the onlooker who experiences this sensation. Such a reaction to an object of this kind forces the viewer to enjoy the disgust no matter how much he or she 'resist[s] it' even 'violently.' In this moment, the art object that conveys disgust becomes identified with the disgust itself, at which point the art object as representation cannot be 'distinguishable from the object itself in our sensation.' In other words, such an object cannot be 'beautifully described,' even with the aid of the aestheticising power of imagination and art (141 [199-200]).<sup>41</sup>

Disgust as a repulsive reaction is, at the same time, a sign of a vivid sensibility in both a physical and moral sense. In his essay on 'Economimesis,' Derrida writes that Kant's concept of disgust ['*dégoût*'] is a key term not only for its negative way of representing the unrepresentable, but also it registers a 'desire to vomit [*envie de vomir*]' in the economy of art.<sup>42</sup> Derrida's understanding of disgust as a moment of emitting something formless which cannot be articulated—but which we still desire to

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<sup>41</sup> For general discussions on the concept of disgust in itself, see Aurél Kolnai, *On Disgust*, ed. Barry Smith and Carolyn Korsmeyer (Chicago: Court, 2004); Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation* (Albany: SUNY, 2003); William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 85-88; and John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Economimesis,' trans. R. Klein, *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 23, Trans. of 'Economimesis,' *Mimesis des articulations*, Sylviane Agacinski et al. ([Paris]: Flammarion, 1975) 91.

voice—bears a close affinity with Shelley's disgust at injustice represented in *Queen Mab*. Shelley's desire to voice his anger in verse form is driven by disgust, aversion, and repulsion in his stomach, heart, and palate.<sup>43</sup> Put differently, in such a moment of disgust, the acute sensibility and delicate imagination more clearly reveal themselves. Kant's definition and Derrida's extensive exploration of disgust thus illustrate that aesthetic taste is not always generated from pleasure, but also from displeasure as disgust, from the strong sensations of the body, which demonstrates an intense power of reaction to the beauty and ugliness in the world. In the case of Shelley, his *dis-gusto* becomes the motive for his poetic recreation of society and this very *dis-gusto* is deeply connected with, what might be understood as, his anti-gastronomy and anti-gourmet concerns in *Queen Mab*. In this attitude lies the basis of his vegetarianism and differentiates Shelley from other Romantic attitudes towards *taste*.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Dis-Gusto and the Disease of Meat-Eating***

The concept of *taste* or *gusto* as well as *dis-gusto*, underpinned by the forces of attraction and repulsion, permeates the world view of Shelley's *Queen Mab*, and his emphasis on bodily sensations within the poem. This point is, for example, illustrated

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. A section entitled 'On Instinct' in Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia; Or, the Laws of Organic Life*: 'Yawning and sometimes vomiting are thus propagated by sympathy, and some people of delicate fibres, at the presence of a spectacle of misery, have felt pain in the same parts of their own bodies, that were diseased or mangled in the other.' Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; Or, the Laws of Organic Life*, vol. 1 (London, 1794) 147.

<sup>44</sup> For other approaches to the relations between taste and Romantic gastronomy, see also Peter Melville, 'A "Friendship of Taste": The Aesthetics of Eating Well in Kant's *Anthropology from A Pragmatic Point of View*,' *Cultures of Taste*, Morton, 203-16; Tilottama Rajan, '(In)Digestible Material: Illness and Dialectic in Hegel's *The Philosophy of Nature*,' *Cultures of Taste*, Morton, 217-36.

by the lines that as ‘the pulse / That fancy kindles in the beating heart / To mingle with its sensation’ (V 87-89). Even the speech of Mab—even though she is a supernatural entity—contains words associated with vivid depictions of physical sensations, including phrases such as the ‘hard bosom’ (I 175), ‘extatic [*sic*] and exulting throb’ (I 176), ‘to rend / The veil of mortal frailty, that the spirit / Clothed in its changeless purity’ (I 180), and then ‘[to] taste / That peace’ (I 184-85). Throughout the cantos of *Queen Mab*, the word ‘taste’—in the physical sense of the mouth, or orality—plays a prominent part and relates to the antitheses of repulsion and attraction. The liveliness of taste is eminent both in a physiological and moral sense. In Canto IV, the ideal state of body and soul is portrayed in the following terms:

Man is of soul and body, formed for deeds  
Of high resolve, on fancy’s boldest wing  
To soar unwearied, fearlessly to turn  
The keenest pangs to peacefulness, and taste  
The joys which mingled sense and spirit yield. (IV 154-58)

The last two lines are intriguing as the narrator once again employs an image of oral sensation. In an ideal state of peace, all living creatures can ‘taste’ the pleasure produced by the ‘mingled sense and spirit’ on earth (157-58). In so far as humankind tastes the ‘joys’ of the healthy ‘sense and spirit’ (158), the world is perfectly harmonised.

It is significant that these lines imply that good taste is based on a well-balanced relationship between body and soul. In this sense, physical health is equal to moral health. D’Holbach articulates precisely the same idea through the expression ‘*Mens*

*sana in corpore sano*’:

Let the natural philosopher, let the anatomist, let the physician, unite their experience and compare their observations, in order to show what ought to be thought of a substance so disguised under a heap of absurdities: let their discoveries teach moralists the true motive-power that ought to influence the actions of man—legislators, the true motives that should excite him to labour to the welfare of society—sovereigns, the means of rendering truly happy the subjects committed to their charge. Physical souls have physical wants, and demand physical and real happiness, far preferable to that variety of fanciful chimeras with which the mind of man has been fed during so many ages. Let us labour to perfect morality of man; let us make it agreeable to him; and we shall presently see his morals become better, himself become happier; his mind become calm and serene; his will determined to virtue by the natural and palpable motives held out to him. By the diligence and care which legislators shall bestow on natural philosophy, they will form citizens of sound understanding, robust and well constituted, who, finding themselves happy, will be themselves accessory to that useful impulse so necessary to general happiness. When the body is suffering, when nations are unhappy, the mind cannot be in a proper state. *Mens sana in corpore sano*, a sound mind in a sound body, this always makes a good citizen. (1: 52 [1: 85])

This passage discusses the importance of ‘[m]ens sana in corpore sano,’ ‘a sound mind in a sound body,’ and avers that there is no sound mind without a sound body. Shelley’s ‘Note 17’ of *Queen Mab*, likewise, observes as follows: ‘No sane mind in a sane body resolves upon a real crime’ (*CPPBS* 2: 302; *Vindication* 80). Importantly, the happiness of body and soul is entirely dependent upon political factors such as ‘legislators,’ ‘the welfare of society,’ ‘sovereigns,’ ‘citizens,’ and ‘nations.’ D’Holbach emphasises the importance of human ‘diligence’ and ‘labour to perfect morality’ for the purposes of

mental health and robustness, which are ‘necessary to general happiness’ in society. At this point, the concept of ‘[m]ens sana in corpore sano’ has an affinity with Bentham’s dictum of ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number.’<sup>45</sup>

This holistic idea of happiness is similarly at work in the world view of *Queen Mab*.<sup>46</sup> Yet, by the same logic, if the moral and physical sensations are misguided, then taste (or lack of taste) can lead one astray towards vices. Here ‘sensualism’ (162) finds ascendancy at the expense of ‘natural love’ (162) and the purity of soul:

Or he [man] is formed for abjectness and woe,  
To grovel on the dunghill of his fears,  
To shrink at every sound, to quench the flame  
Of natural love in sensualism. [...]

War is the statesman’s game, the priest’s delight,  
The lawyer’s jest, the hired assassin’s trade,  
And, to those royal murderers, whose mean thrones  
Are bought by crimes of treachery and gore,  
The bread they eat, the staff on which they lean. (IV 159-62, 168-72)

These participants in tyranny are aligned with the concrete image of ‘bread’ (172) and

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<sup>45</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Deontology, Deontology; together with a Table of the Springs of Action; and the Article on Utilitarianism*, ed. Amnon Goldworth (1983; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 291. Bentham often employs similar expressions throughout his works, and yet he might have derived this phrase directly from a 1767 English translation of Cesare Beccaria’s *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments* (*Deontology* 291n4). See Cesare Beccaria, *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments, Translated from the Italian; with a Commentary* (London: 1767) 2. In 1819, Shelley actually sets out to write *A Philosophical View of Reform* (1820) for ‘the philosophical reformers politically considered, like Jeremy Bentham’s something, but different & perhaps more systematic’ (*LPBS* 2: 201). For Shelley and Bentham, see Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 210-33. With regard to Shelley’s political idea of the nation in *A Philosophical View of Reform*, see William Keach, ‘Shelley and the Constitution of Political Authority,’ *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 39-48; and Mark Kipperman, ‘Shelley and the Ideology of Nation: The Authority of the Poet,’ Bennett and Curran, 49-59.

<sup>46</sup> I discuss this holistic idea of happiness in Chapter V in relation to Erasmus Darwin’s term ‘organic happiness.’

associated with harsh and derogatory comments. This imagery is in marked contrast to those who ‘taste / The joys which mingled sense and spirit yield.’ This ‘sensualism’ is later paraphrased as ‘mean lust’ (166)—that is, all base desires—and identified as one of the key characteristics of tyranny, which the Fairy Mab calls ‘the memory / Of senselessness and shame’ (II 113-14). Mab’s discourse distinguishes ethically degraded ‘sensualism’ from delightful sensations, so that ‘sensualism’ results from a senseless or insensible spirit and selfish desire. For Shelley, ‘sensualism’ is nothing to do with ‘natural love’ (IV 162), because, as Shelley wrote in a letter, it is ‘the love of pleasure, not the love of happiness’ (*LPBS* 1: 173).

Throughout the poem tyranny, as an embodiment of ‘sensualism,’ is often connected to greed and gluttony (at times, this concept is identical even to licentiousness or the sin of the flesh). These vices of perverse appetite are inseparable from the antitype of taste in the guise of disgust as a form of repulsion. In this respect, politics, wars, religion, and commerce are all forms of tyranny which are captured in the image of the fierce and ‘tameless tygers hungering for blood’ (IV 211-13). The tigers’ hunger threatens the oppressed people’s lives. Once again, the tiger imagery is associated, in *Queen Mab*, with the brutality of monarchy:

And where the startled wilderness beheld  
A savage conqueror stained in kindred blood,  
A tygress sating with the flesh of lambs,  
The unnatural famine of her toothless cubs [...]. (VIII 77-80)

The ‘unnatural famine’ (80) suggests that the act of flesh-eating is both economically

and morally harmful. The combination of carnivores and tyrannical sensualism represents Shelley's abhorrence and disgust, simply because, for him, it cuts against the fundamental basis of human nature as encapsulated by the 'natural love' of humankind.

This complicity of the 'savage conqueror' (IV 78) with the carnivorous 'tygress' (IV 79), therefore, points to the same logic established in Shelley's vegetarian politics in the *Vindication*, which criticises the physical and moral violence of all autocratic institutions. Shelley's 'Note 17' asserts that vegetarianism naturally suits the human body: 'Comparative anatomy teaches us that man resembles frugivorous animals in every thing, and carnivorous in nothing' (*CPPBS* 2: 299; *Vindication* 80). Shelley also notes the close resemblance of the human stomach with that of the orang-outang (*CPPBS* 2: 300; *Vindication* 80). For Shelley's stringent vegetarianism, the 'perverted appetite' causes 'bodily and mental illness' in human civilisation (*CPPBS* 2: 301; *Vindication* 83). To explain this point, Shelley quotes the Greek thinker, Plutarch, and his writing *On the Eating of Flesh* in *Moralia* at the end of 'Note 17' to *Queen Mab*:

That man is not by nature destined to devour animal food, is evident from the construction of the human frame, which bears no resemblance to wild beasts, or birds of prey. Man is not provided with claws or talons, with sharpness of fang, or tusk, so well adapted to tear and lacerate; nor is his stomach so well braced and muscular, nor his animal spirits so warm as to enable him to digest this solid mass of animal flesh. On the contrary, nature has made his teeth smooth, his mouth narrow, and his tongue soft; and had contrived, by the slowness of his digestion, to divert him from devouring a species of food so ill adapted to his frame and constitution. [...]. The difficulty of digesting such a mass of matter reduced in our stomachs to a state of liquefaction and putrefaction, is the source of endless disorders in the



human frame.

First of all, the wild mischievous animals were selected for food, and then the birds and fishes were dragged to slaughter; next the human appetite directed itself directed itself against the laborious ox, the useful and fleece-bearing sheep, and the cock, the guardian of the house. At last, by this preparatory discipline, man became matured for human massacres, slaughters, and wars. (*CPPBS* ['Commentaries'] 2: 669-670)

Through Plutarch, Shelley claims that there is a mismatch between the human stomach and flesh-eating. It is hard to digest meat in the stomach, because meat-eating causes both a physical and mental repulsion. From Shelley's stringent vegetarian viewpoint, this 'perverted appetite' for an unnatural diet causes 'bodily and mental illness' in human civilisation (*CPPBS* 2: 302; *Vindication* 83).

In this context, the materiality of the pulse in both their physical (of beating) and moral (of feeling) sense of *taste* is of particular significance, especially when read in conjunction with Shelley's vegetarianism, which is inextricable from his political thought and anxieties over health. As a matter of fact, in 'Note 17' of *Queen Mab*, Shelley relates the habit of consuming meat to the politics of the French Revolution and Napoleon's reign:

Surely the bile-suffused cheek of Buonaparte, his wrinkled brow, and yellow eye, the ceaseless inquietude of his nervous system, speak no less plainly the character of his unresting ambition than his murders and his victories. It is impossible, had Buonaparte descended from a race of vegetable feeders, that he could have had either the inclination or the power to ascend the throne of the Bourbons. (*CPPBS* 2: 303; *Vindication* 83)<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft discusses male domination over women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with the word 'a gross appetite' (5: 133).

Shelley claims that flesh eating causes Napoleon's nervous disease, which results in 'his unresting ambition' and sacrifice of human life in wars.<sup>48</sup> This point is resonant with Plutarch's understanding of meat-eating as a 'preparatory discipline,' by which 'man became matured for human massacres, slaughters, and wars.' In this way, the human body is highly susceptible to the poisonous effect of an unnatural diet conducted to in the name of *taste* or *gusto*.<sup>49</sup>

This association in monarchs who over-eat flesh of mental and physical diseases is even more pronounced in Gillray's celebrated caricature, *A Voluptuary under the Horrors of Digestion* (1792), which satirises the Prince Regent's dietary habits before he becomes George IV.<sup>50</sup> The younger Shelley is hostile to the Prince Regent and mocks the Prince's grand fête in his letter to Edward Fergus Graham, written in June 1811 (Shelley *LPBS* 1: 105-06). Shelley's objections were also versified in a fragment poem, 'On A Fête at Carlton House':

By the mossy brink,  
With me the Prince shall sit and think;  
Shall muse in visioned Regency,

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<sup>48</sup> For details of the political aspect of British literary culture after Napoleon's decline, including Byron and Walter Scott, see Richard Cronin, *Paper Pellets: British Literary Culture after Waterloo* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> For the relationship between the pursuit of *gourmet* cooking and slavery, see Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999) 131-54; Timothy Morton, *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 171-206; and also 'The Plantation of Wrath.' *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, ed. Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002) 64-85.

<sup>50</sup> James Gillray, *A Voluptuary under the horrors of Digestion, a Print* (London, 1792), British Museum, London, 1 March 2011  
<[http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_image.aspx?image=ps342452.jpg&retpage=21555](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_image.aspx?image=ps342452.jpg&retpage=21555)>.

Rapt in bright dreams of dawning Royalty.<sup>51</sup>

The Prince Regent, who was also a member of the ‘Sublime Society of Beef-steaks,’ became notorious as an iconic figure of the meat-diet and the contemporary *gourmet* or *epicurean* establishments.<sup>52</sup> Shelley, in *Queen Mab*, alludes to the Prince Regent as both ‘King’ (III 30) of a ‘bloodless heart’ (III 37) with ‘a slave / Even to the basest appetites’ (III 32-33):

Now to the meal  
Of silence, grandeur, and excess, he drags  
His palled unwilling appetite. If gold,  
Gleaming around, and numerous viands culled  
From every clime, could force the loathing sense  
To overcome satiety,—if wealth  
The spring it draws from poisons not,—or vice,  
Unfeeling, stubborn vice, converteth not  
Its food to deadliest venom; then that king  
Is happy [...]. (III 44-53)<sup>53</sup>

Like d’Holbach’s holistic view of social health care, the lines about the king’s diet indicate that no matter how extraordinarily sumptuous his meals are, the king’s ‘unwilling appetite’ (46) is forced to ‘overcome satiety’ (49). These lines suggest that the wealth sustaining the king’s extravagant life is the product of a subjugated people about whom the king cares little—due to his ‘[u]nfeeling’ (51) and ‘bloodless heart’ (III 37)—as a consequence of his vices gluttonously feeding on the food of ‘deadliest

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<sup>51</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘On A Fête at Carlton House,’ *CPPBS*, 1: 451. See also *LPBS* 1: 282.

<sup>52</sup> For more details about George IV and the *gourmet* culture at the time, see the chapter entitled ‘The Gastronomer and the Snob: George IV’ in Gigante’s *Taste* (160-80).

<sup>53</sup> According to David Duff, Shelley here alludes to King George III’s palace through the allegory of ‘the joyless place of the King.’ David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 92.

venom' (52).

According to Christopher Hibbert, the Prince Regent often had a high temperature due to his over-drinking, and this explains why the king in *Queen Mab* is depicted by Shelley as delirious with high fever and sickness: 'his fevered brain / Reels dizzily awhile' (III 58-59) with his 'frenzied eye' (III 62) and 'deadly visage' (III 63).<sup>54</sup> Building on Thomas Trotter's theory, Shelley draws an analogy between flesh-eating and habitual drinking: 'Dr. Trotter asserts, that no drunkard was ever reformed by gradually relinquishing his dram. Animal flesh in its effects on the human stomach is analogous to a dram. It is similar to the kind, though differing in the degree, of its operation' (*CPPBS* 2: 308; *Vindication* 89). The drunken king's excessive and gluttonous meat-eating numbs the stomach and other senses. Therefore, this kind of excessive 'sensualism' is a sign of a lack of sensibility or, alternatively, senselessness. Benumbed by extravagance, the king's '[u]nfeeling' senses are placed in opposition to 'the peasant[s]' (III 55) sound sensations to taste 'a sweeter meal' (III 57). The Prince Regent was, as Gigante says, a populariser of French cuisine and invited a number of French chefs to London ('Romanticism and Taste' 410-11). A meat-diet results in this description of the self-indulgent king as a diseased *epicure*, whose *goût* can easily turn into gout (The Prince Regent actually had an attack of gout in 1811, some six months after Shelley wrote 'On A Fête at Carlton House').<sup>55</sup> In this context, the king's high

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<sup>54</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *George IV* (1972; London: Penguin, 1976) 61. As Duff reads in *Romance and Revolution*, this depiction also echoes the mental illness of the king George III (*Romance and Revolution* 92).

<sup>55</sup> E. G. L. Bywaters, 'Gout in the Time and Person of George IV: A Case History,' *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* 21.4 (1962): 325-38. For an overview of the historical approach to gout

fever and unrelenting body pain works as a metaphor of an unsound form of monarchy founded on extravagance and ‘sensualism,’ as alluded in the title of Shelley’s later drama, *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant* (1820), a satirical comedy about the Prince Regent’s infidelity (‘swellfoot’ is a typical symptom of gout, which the Prince Regent suffered from).<sup>56</sup> Both physically and morally immobilised, now the king’s ‘loathing sense’ (III 48) of the ‘numerous viands’ (III 47) reflect Shelley’s disgust at the king’s carnivorous gluttony as a result of the practice of meat-eating and gastronomy.<sup>57</sup>

Shelley’s gastro-politics is expressed through *Queen Mab*’s descriptions of physical sensation in the form of disgust, repulsion, and nausea (as an antonym of the word *gusto*). Shelley’s radical politics and vegetarianism are prompted by his own

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during the Romantic period, see Roy Porter and G. S. Rousseau, *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998) 125-207.

<sup>56</sup> For details of the Queen Caroline affair alluded to in this drama, see Steven E. Jones, *Shelley’s Satire: Violence, Exhortation, and Authority* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1994) 124-48.

<sup>57</sup> A diet of pure water and nutritious vegetables is Shelley’s preferred alternative to a meat-diet as a chronic disease. In this context, there is a connection between Shelley and the eighteenth-century physician George Cheyne. According to Cheyne, the coolness of the vegetables cures the disease by cooling down the fever. George Cheyne, *Essay on Regimen: together with Five Discourses, Medical, Moral, and Philosophical Serving to Illustrate the Principles and Theory of Philosophical Medicine [sic], and Point out Some of Its Moral Consequences*, 2nd ed. (London, 1740) 83. I owe this point to the following article. Lizbeth Chapin, ‘Science and Spirit: Shelley’s Vegetarian Essays and the Body as Utopian State,’ *A Brighter Morn: The Shelley Circle’s Utopian Project* (Lexington: Lanham, 2002) 125, 141n3. Chapin also emphasises the importance of empathy and the sound body for the utopianism of *Queen Mab* in the context of a mother-child relationship: ‘he [Shelley or person] converged the purest sustenance (vegetable diet) with empathy for the physical sensations of other animals. Idealized here, this concept becomes clear: the ego’s being subsumed by the mother is a blissful connective to all of life’ (127). Similarly, Duff remarks that ‘[i]n Shelley’s utopia, by comparison, the union of body and mind, of “soul” and “sense,” is a central feature. “Reason and passion cease to combat there,” says Mab’ (*Romance and Revolution* 106). For similarities and differences between Godwin’s and Shelley’s utopianism see Duff, *Romance and Revolution*, 97-108. For the influence of Godwin’s political theory on Shelley, see P. M. S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 76-133.

repulsion at, or disgust with, tyranny, monarchy, and other forms of social injustices. To reinforce the negative aspect of a meat-diet, Shelley reiterates such words as ‘disgusting,’ ‘loathing,’ and ‘disgust’ in ‘Note 17’ of *Queen Mab*:

After every subterfuge of gluttony, the bull must be degraded into the ox, and the ram into the wether, by an unnatural and inhuman operation, that the flaccid fibre may offer a fainter resistance to rebellious nature. It is only by softening and disguising dead flesh by culinary preparation, that it is rendered susceptible of mastication or digestion; and that the sight of its bloody juices and raw horror, does not excite intolerable loathing and disgust. (*CPPBS* 2: 299; *Vindication* 80)

On one level, Shelley explains with the castration of ‘the ox’ and ‘the wether’ how meat-eating blunts the physical strength and energy of animals. On another level, it is also the case with humans in a sense of degradation, because eating ‘dead flesh’ in human society is, according to Shelley, based on this ‘subterfuge of gluttony,’ which covers up the reality of innocent animals slaughtered through ‘an unnatural and inhuman operation [...] by culinary preparation.’ According to this logic, there is no difference between the slaughtered animals and the oppressed people—who are called ‘the swinish multitude’ by Mammon in *Oedipus Tyrannus* (I 194)—ruled by an unfeeling and overindulgent king.<sup>58</sup> Once again, and even more vividly, emerges the metaphor of another form of cannibalism. Shelley offers Prometheus’s gift to human as

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<sup>58</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant*, *POS*, 3: 678. See also *LPBS* 1: 294. Burke originally employed this phrase (though ‘a swinish multitude’ rather than ‘the swinish multitude’). See, Roland Bartel, ‘Shelley and Burke’s Swinish Multitude,’ *Keats-Shelley Journal* 18 (1969): 4-9. Morton reads the Pigs as ‘more especially the labouring classes whose diet is potatoes and oatmeal’ exploited for ‘meat within culture’ *SRT* 197. See also Timothy Morton, ‘Porcine Poetics: Shelley’s *Swellfoot the Tyrant*,’ Weinberg and Webb, 279-95.

fire as an allegory referring to the introduction of cookery that make meat-eating palatable. Ironically, Prometheus's application of 'fire to culinary purposes' is used as 'an expedient for screening from disgust the horrors of the shambles'—that is the slaughtering of animals. Consequently, Prometheus's action results in suffering endless torture, having his liver eaten by an eagle, as if it were revenge from animals. Shelley makes this point through an ingenious reading of the Promethean myth—'his vitals were devoured by the vulture of disease [such as gout that the king suffers]' (*CPPBS* 2: 297; *Vindication* 78).

Shelley abhors all degrading bestial vices in human society. Passing through the stomach and palate, the very sensation of disgust becomes a counterpart of aesthetic taste or *gusto*. For the vegetarian politics of *Queen Mab*, the concept of disgust, experienced as a strong bodily sensation, is expressed against the *gusto* of sanguine monarchy represented by the king as an excessive *epicure*. This is one of the reasons why Shelley insists on the necessity of vegetarianism, which enhances the power of the sensibility of both the mind and body. Shelley, in this context, believes that the practice of vegetarianism enhances all the action, or reaction, of the pulse—heart-beat, sensibility, and sympathy (*Queen Mab* IV 123, 149).<sup>59</sup> 'Note 17' of *Queen Mab* further relates this idea to Locke's empiricist philosophy: 'Should ever a physician be born with the genius of Locke, I am persuaded that he might trace all bodily and mental

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<sup>59</sup> Morton also looks out for the word 'pulse,' and yet more focused on vegetarian and eco-political discourses amongst Romantic authors, rather than exploring the function of the pulses in Shelley's poetry including *Queen Mab*. Timothy Morton, 'The Pulses of the Body: Romantic Vegetarianism and Its Cultural Context,' *1650-1850: Ideas Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Kevin L. Cope, vol. 4 (New York: AMS, 1998) 53-87.

derangements to our unnatural habits, as clearly as that philosopher has traced all knowledge to sensation' (*CPPBS* 2: 302; *Vindication* 82). As a negative example of this empirical explanation, the Fairy Mab's speech about monarchy depicts the danger both of mental and physical insensibility, caused by a meat-diet, which leads to moral degradation and social injustices in human society. In *Queen Mab* 'Power, like a desolating pestilence, / Pollutes whate'er it touches' (III 176-77). On the other, 'obedience, / Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth, / Makes slaves of men, and, of the human frame, / A mechanized automaton' (III 178-80). Oppressed in their 'valueless and miserable life' (V 248), the subjugated people '[w]ho hope for peace amid the storms of care' (V 240) are surrounded by 'bitterness of soul, / Pining regrets, and vain repentances, / Disease, disgust, and lassitude [...]' (V 245-47). The people's 'disgust' also mirrors Shelley's own 'disgust' or *dis-gusto* at meat-eating as the cause of tyranny and subjugation of both humanity and animals. Shelley's *dis-gusto*, simultaneously, stimulates his own passion (sensibility) to raise political awareness of the need for social reform in the form of poetry.

### **3. Towards an Ideal State of Health: On the Tyranny of Commerce and Religion**

#### **Sympathy as an Antidote to Excessive Commercialism**

In the framework of *Queen Mab*, any political forms which blunt and weaken the function of human sensibility are evil, wrong, and degraded. For instance, *Oedipus Tyrannus* demonstrates that tyranny, the worst form of monarchy, is supported by



Mammon, the false god of money, who plays the part of the ‘Arch-Priest of Famine.’ Even in *Queen Mab*, Mab already illustrates how ‘Commerce,’ another form of autocracy, is poisonous to the human ‘body and soul’ (V 51): ‘Commerce! beneath whose poison-breathing shade / No solitary virtue dares to spring’ (V 44-45). ‘Commerce’ entails such harmful effects as ‘poverty’ (V 46), ‘violent death’ (V 48), ‘pining famine and full fed-disease’ (V 49), ‘selfishness’ (V 55) and ‘Gold’ elevated to ‘a living god’ (V 62).<sup>60</sup> Here the chief god, Mammon, is revered by those who are engaged in the ‘sale of human life’ (V 64) ‘with blind feeling’ (V 59).<sup>61</sup> The human soul and body are poisoned and paralysed by this personified figure of Gold as Mammon accompanied by the allegorical figure of ‘Success’:

[...] from his [Success’s] cabinet  
 These puppets of his schemes he moves at will,  
 Even as the slaves by force or famine driven,  
 Beneath a vulgar master, to perform  
 A task of cold and brutal drudgery;—  
 Hardened to hope, insensible to fear,  
 Scarce living pullies of a dead machine,  
 Mere wheels of work and articles of trade,  
 That grace the proud and noisy pomp of wealth! (V 70-78)<sup>62</sup>

The ‘slaves’ (72) of ‘Commerce’ are insensible as ‘puppets’ (71) or ‘[m]ere wheels of

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<sup>60</sup> See also Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982) 72. ‘Against the tyranny of gold and the selfish ego, the poem enlists the will and the imagination of the poet. Since Shelley believes that neither the tyrants nor the victims can initiate the movement toward utopia, it will have to be the outsider, the poet with strength and benevolence, who will point the way’ (76).

<sup>61</sup> See also Morton, *SRT* 198.

<sup>62</sup> See ‘Note 3’ (IV 178-79) on ‘the military character’ quoted from ‘*Godwin’s Enquirer, Essay V*’: ‘a soldier is, of all descriptions of men, the most completely a machine; yet his profession inevitably teaches him something of dogmatism, and self-consequence: he is like the puppet of a showman [...]’ (*CPPBS* 2: 241-42).

work' (76) as we witness humanity turned into 'dead machine[s]' (75) through what we would today consider common and stereo-typical metaphors. But in Shelley's own time, these metaphors offer a fresh image that vividly captures the side-effects of capitalist consumerism and industrial culture almost a half century before Marx's *Capital* (*Das Kapital* 1867), and more than a century before Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936).<sup>63</sup> Such a criticism of 'Commerce' is also the reason why *Queen Mab* attracted later socialists and was labelled 'The Chartist's Bible' by George Bernard Shaw.<sup>64</sup>

In this way, Shelley's quasi-materialistic poem *Queen Mab* offers an anti-Mammonism or anti-materialistic perspective in its rejection of commercialism, which never wholly rejects philosophical materialism.<sup>65</sup> This problem is later

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<sup>63</sup> For the image of labourers as machines or wheels in the large structure of capitalism, see Karl Marx, *Capital: A New Abridgement*, trans. and ed. David McLellan (1995; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 361-62. Marx himself leaves a comment on Shelley: 'he was essentially a revolutionist, and he would always have been one of the advanced guard of Socialism.' Quoted from Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx-Aveling, *Shelley's Socialism: Two Lectures* (1947; London, 1975) 16. For a comparison of *Queen Mab* with 'scientific socialism' including *Communist Manifesto*, see Duff, *Romance* 113-14; and Horst Hölne, 'Shelley's Socialism Revisited,' Bennett and Curran, 201-12. For other philosophical readings of Shelley along with Marx, see Terrence Allan Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology: Shelley's Political Prose and Its Philosophical Context from Bacon to Marx*, (Iowa: U of Iowa P, 1988) 79-138; and Timothy Morton, 'Let Them Eat Romanticism: Materialism, Ideology, and Diet Studies,' *Cultures of Taste*, Morton, 257-75. For Shelley and Marxism, see William Keach, 'Shelley and the Revolutionary Left,' *Evaluating Shelley*, ed. Timothy Clark and Jerrold E. Hogle (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996) 75-90.

<sup>64</sup> George Bernard Shaw, 'Shaming the Devil about Shelley,' *Selected Non-Dramatic Writings of Bernard Shaw*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (Boston: Houghton, 1965) 321. For example, see Richard Carlile, 'A Review of *Queen Mab*,' *The Republican* 5 (1822): 148. For more about the Chartist's reception of Shelley's *Queen Mab*, see Bouthaina Shaaban 'Shelley in the Chartist Press,' *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 34 (1983): 41-60, and 'The Romantics in the Chartist Press,' *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 38 (1989): 25-45 and also 'Shelley and the Chartists' Bennett and Curran, 114-25; and Mike Sanders, *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 39-68. For Shelley's influence on both the Chartists and Owenian socialists, see Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 115, 125-27.

<sup>65</sup> In *The Poetics of Spice*, Morton argues that for Shelley, commerce is a *pharmakon*—poison and cure—in the Derridian sense. Taking his cue from this concept, Morton reveals the intricate (and even self-contradictory) workings of Shelley's anti-capitalism as deployed in *Queen Mab*, which is glimpsed in the imagery of 'spice' (90-104).

epitomised in a passage from *A Defence of Poetry*, in which Shelley describes the cult of Mammon in terms of political economy through a gastronomic metaphor:

We have more moral, political and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practise; we have more scientific and œconomical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies. The poetry in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes. [...] We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave. [...] Poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and the Mammon of the world. (*SPP* 530-31)<sup>66</sup>

Even though Shelley's contemporary society is content with its political economy, a 'scientific and œconomical knowledge,' for Shelley, often lacks 'the poetry of life' due to a 'want of the creative faculty to imagine' and 'the generous impulse to act' what is imagined.<sup>67</sup> Shelley's implicit criticism of Adam Smith's theory suggests that the poet has harboured this idea even since the composition of *Queen Mab*, in which the Fairy Queen, alluding to Adam Smith's economic theory, claims that *laissez-faire* capitalism promotes excessive commercialism which devastates the harmony of human society

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<sup>66</sup> Catherine Gallagher briefly refers to Shelley's political politic in his *A Philosophical View of Reform*, discussing his critique and 'unwitting repetition of Malthus' in ways that share with Malthus the same view concerning the labourers' suffering and the eudemonist-based utilitarianism. See Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006) 14-18.

<sup>67</sup> In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley states: 'I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus' (*SPP* 209).

due to the ‘poison of his [man’s] soul’ (V 83), ‘selfish gain’ (V 85), and ‘slavish fear’ (V 86).<sup>68</sup> In *A Defence of Poetry*, the difficult circumstances in his contemporary society are described through a metaphor of indigestion: ‘we have eaten more than we can digest.’ Apart from the fact that this argument overtly champions the role of poetry in society to defend it from Peacock’s criticism deployed in *The Four Ages of Poetry*, Shelley emphasises the importance of the poetical faculty as a prescription for such difficulties in digestion.

From this passage, we can deduce the roles of poetic imagination and vegetarianism are to support the need for a utopian society through aesthetics, the power of imagination, and sympathy, all of which are critical to the reform of the world envisaged in *Queen Mab*. To realise this reformation the strong and vivid sensation of physicality and materiality has priority over everything else. Simultaneously, this antipathy towards human mechanisation indirectly denies pure materialism, which regarded the human body as a complex machine. For Shelley, poetry which is inseparable from somatic and imaginative sensation—aesthetic taste (pleasure of the palate)—is the best medium to resist the excessive materialism caused by the worship of Mammon and to nurture the powers of moral and aesthetic judgement.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See also Shelley’s ‘Note 7’ (*CPPBS* 2: 249).

<sup>69</sup> Keats was also aware of this contagious effect of consumerism in the sense that excessive ‘consumption’ in consumerism leads to diseases such as the ‘consumption’ from which Keats suffered. Like Shelley, Keats too refers to Mammon in a letter to Shelley dated 16 August 1820: ‘the Poetry, and dramatic effect—which by many spirits nowadays is considered the mammon. A modern work it is said must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon; he must have “self-concentration,” selfishness perhaps’ (*Selected Letters of John Keats* 464). For a detailed analysis of this point, see also Gigante, *Taste* 153; and for Keats’s consumption as tuberculosis in relation to other contemporary poets including Shelley, see Lawlor, 111-52.

## The Use of Sensibility: Against Religious Superstition

Shelley censures the autocracy and violence caused by monarchy and commerce up until the end of Canto V. In Canto VI and VII, the poet changes the target of his criticism to what he calls 'Religion.' These three elements—monarchy, commerce, and religion—constitute an unholy trinity in *Queen Mab*.<sup>70</sup> Shelley wrote in a letter to his publisher: 'The notes will be long philosophical, & Anti Christian' (1:361). Shelley, who shares the concept of 'Necessity' (VI 198) or 'the Spirit of Nature' (VI 197) with the Enlightenment or French materialist philosophers, fiercely attacks all religions which worship 'the God of human error' (VI 199) as superstition. By the poet's standards, superstitious religions are the last obstacle to achieving total social reform, as their rigid dogmas, for Shelley, blur and obscure the human eye, preventing it from seeing and feeling the world. For the same reason, this sensibility is a source of another form of superstition, pantheism. Lines from Canto VI, for example, exhibit and test a pantheistic depiction—with a flavour of Wordsworth's 'Intimation Ode'—of nature through sense experience:

Thou [Religion] taintest all thou lookest upon!—the stars,  
Which on thy cradle beamed so brightly sweet,  
Were gods to the distempered playfulness  
Of thy untutored infancy: the trees,

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<sup>70</sup> As a matter of fact, Shelley refers to this unholy trinity resulting from flesh-eating in Note 17 'All vice arose from the ruin of healthful innocence. Tyranny, superstition [institutionalised religions], commerce, and inequality, were then first known, when reason vainly attempted to guide the wanderings of exacerbated passion' (297; *Vindication* 78). Gerald McNiece also posits the following chart of autocratic power at work in *Queen Mab*: 'First men have kings, then a god in the age of the kings, and finally, the true god of men in a commercial age, Gold—a god who unites the three tyrannies.' Gerald McNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969) 147.

The grass, the clouds, the mountains and the sea,  
All living things that walk, swim, creep, or fly,  
Were gods: the sun had homage, and the moon  
Her worshipper. Then thou becamest, a boy,  
More daring in thy frenzies: every shape,  
Monstrous or vast, or beautifully wild,  
Which, from sensation's relics, fancy culls;  
The spirits of the air, the shuddering ghost,  
The genii of the elements, the powers  
That give a shape to nature's varied works,  
Had life and place in the corrupt belief  
Of thy blind heart: yet still thy youthful hands  
Were pure of human blood. (VI 72-88)

The vivid description of nature reinforces the freshness of human sensibility which is, as it were, that of 'a boy' (79). This 'boy' alludes to the childhood of the human race, which indicates an ancient religious form, and to the eyes of this boy, all 'living things' are 'gods' (76-77). Here is the concept that 'God is in the details' in a literal sense, and from 'sensation's relics, fancy culls' (82) various imaginative forms of natural beauty as well as mysteries such as 'spirits' or 'ghosts' (83). The Fairy Queen states that, even though polytheism was born 'in the corrupt belief / Of thy blind heart' (86-87), this religious view was, in contrast to today's religion, still 'pure of human blood' (88). In this sense, the word 'culls' starts to work doubly—on one level, the fancy of pantheism that 'culls' imaginative creatures from active sensitivity to nature (though with a 'blind heart') is still better and less 'tainted' than the violence of 'the tainted' Religion that relentlessly culls (as if they were slaughtered animals) those imaginative forms which

the fancy conveys.

The Fairy Mab's account of pantheism as a product of the 'blind heart' seems a self-denial of her identity as the Fairy Queen, but her cosmology of the universe is, in its very essence, not so far from pantheistic views as both of them have the same root of belief in the senses or feelings. She goes on to account for a system of nature ruled by 'Necessity' as the 'Soul of the Universe! eternal spring / Of life and death, of happiness and woe' (VI 190-91) or 'all-sufficing Power' (VI 197). These lines show that there is, rather than 'the God of human error,' a divine goddess as the 'mother of the world' (VI 198). This mother goddess transcends all human physical perception as the Fairy says 'we feel, but cannot see' (VI 196). The 'mother of the world' as a transcendent deity is wholly indifferent to human emotion:

all that the wide world contains  
Are but thy passive instruments, and thou  
Regardst them all with an impartial eye,  
Whose joy or pain thy nature cannot feel,  
Because thou hast not human sense,  
Because thou art not human mind. (VI 214-19)

Yet, 'Necessity' strengthens human sensibility because the whole of the earth is its 'shrine':

A shrine is raised to thee [Necessity],  
Which, nor the tempest breath of time,  
Nor the interminable flood,  
Over earth's slight pageant rolling,  
Availeth to destroy,—  
The sensitive extension of the world.

That wonderous [*sic*] and eternal fane,  
Where pain and pleasure, good and evil join,  
To do the will of strong necessity [...]. (VI 226-34)

Here the earth, the ‘eternal fane’ (238), is understood as the ‘sensitive extension of the world’ (231), in which ‘pain and pleasure,’ ‘good and evil’ (232) work in accordance with the power of ‘necessity’ (234) to indicate that the ‘shrine’ or ‘fane’ of ‘Necessity’ extends to each pulse of the human body.

The relationship between the world and the sensitive pulse can be re-imagined in ways that demonstrate the role of a recorder to memorise the beauty of the natural world. Shortly before the speech of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, Ianthe’s spirit declares:

O Spirit! through the sense  
By which thy inner nature was apprised  
Of outward shews, vague dreams have rolled,  
And varied reminiscences have waked  
Tablets that never fade;  
All things have been imprinted there,  
The stars, the sea, the earth, the sky,  
Even the unshapeliest lineaments  
Of wild and fleeting visions  
Have left a record there  
To testify of earth. (VII 49-59)

Fully operating the ‘sense’ (49) of perception, the human eye imprints ‘varied reminiscences’ (52) of all things it perceives onto the mind as ‘a record there / To testify of earth’ (58-59). This operation of sensibility is the first step to reform a world subjugated by the tyranny of religion and to save spiritually those blinded humans.



In Shelley's account of the tyranny of religion, the figure of Ahasuerus emerges as a negative example which hinders humans from achieving the ideal state of health. Cursed by an 'angel of death,' Ahasuerus has a body never decaying 'not able to die,' but 'to be doomed to be imprisoned for ever in the clay-formed dungeon' ('Note 14' 278, 283). In this respect, far from being in the state of *mens sana in corpore sano*, the strong-willed Ahasuerus never gives up his endless fight against 'an almighty God' (VII 84) as 'a heartless conqueror of the earth' (VII 113) and defiantly proclaims that he 'had long learned to prefer / Hell's freedom to the servitude of heaven' (VII 195-96). Ahasuerus, in a 'peaceful, serene, and self-enshrined' (VII 256) mood, yet still 'with stubborn and unalterable will' (VII 258), continues his oratory to depict himself through the following extended simile:

Even as a giant oak, which heaven's fierce flame  
Had scathed in the wilderness, to stand  
A monument of fadeless ruin there;  
Yet peacefully and movelessly it braves  
The midnight conflict of the wintry storm,  
As in the sun-light's calm it spreads  
Its worn and withered arms on high  
To meet the quiet of a summer's noon. (VII 259-66)

This portrayal of Ahasuerus resembles the figure of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, who challenges almighty 'heaven's fierce flame' (259). Although Ahasuerus resigns himself to his eternal 'whirlwinds of mad agony' (255), the image of 'a giant oak' traditionally signifies kingship, which indicates that Ahasuerus is in the end only the king of himself and 'enshrined' in his own kingdom.

Ahasuerus's character is further illuminated through his antitype, Christ, for whom, 'on the torturing cross / No pain assailed his unterrestrial sense' (VII 174-75). Even though Ahasuerus criticises Christ for bringing religious wars to the world, Christ, who 'led / The crowd; he taught them justice, truth, and peace, / In semblance' (VII 167-69), at the same time, is depicted in Shelley's note as 'a man of pure life, who desired to rescue his countrymen from the tyranny of their barbarous and degrading superstitions' ('Note 15' 285). In contrast to the figure of Christ, who always communicated with 'his countrymen' through his teaching, Ahasuerus's personification as the 'oak' seeking for 'the quiet of a summer's noon' (VII 266) emphasises the Wandering Jew's solitude and loneliness. This image of this personified oak's spreading arms reminds us of Ahasuerus himself stretching his exhausted and benumbed arms to embrace somebody to love and continuing 'to hurl down scull [*sic*] after scull' to find the skulls of his family' ('Note 14' 279). In spite of his purported calmness, Ahasuerus's tropes reveal that the Wandering Jew lacks love and wants a community or partner, at least, with whom he can share his life. In this sense he is, as it were, Shelley's version of the creature in *Frankenstein*.

The cursed Ahasuerus eternally wanders to find love's light that kindles his heart in 'the wintry storm' (VII 263), 'peacefully' (VII 262) and 'movelessly' (VII 262), but this also implies Ahasuerus's insensible mind rather than a calm mental state. This insensibility is undoubtedly caused by his solitude and lack of love. Ahasuerus is, in this respect, a prototype of the solitary Poet in *Alastor* wandering the world in search of

his ideal 'Vison and Love' (366). Such a concept of love is of particular importance to Shelley's later poetic drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, in which Prometheus, a variation on Ahasuerus as a rebel against an almighty oppressor, renovates the world through the power of love together with his counterpart Asia and her sisters. Even in the world of *Queen Mab*, the importance of love is prefigured through the couple of Ianthe and her lover, Henry, supported by the Fairy Mab. Love functions as one of the essential concepts to harmonise human society through the active power of physical and mental sensibility, as exhibited through the concept of attraction and its counterpart of repulsion in Shelley's adoption of d'Holbach's cosmology.

#### **4. For a Vegetarian Reformation of Society through (Dis)Gusto**

##### **Shelley's *Gusto* and Aesthetic Experience**

Overcoming the three prime obstacles of autocratic monarchy, commercialism, and religion, Shelley's utopia is glimpsed in Canto VIII and IX. This is still a dream vision, but one vividly depicted. The Fairy Mab speaks of the significance of sensibility as offering another solution to social problems and the insensibility of the human nervous system caused by 'sensualism,' namely, moral insensibility. This nervous disorder is a symptom of the moral degradation of human sensibility and 'frenzies' (VI 80) that blunt 'the keenness of his [or her] spiritual sense' (V 162). In the cosmology of *Queen Mab*, these sensibilities and insensibilities correspond to d'Holbach's theory of the opposition of 'attraction (love)' and 'repulsion (hate),' on which Shelley's version of

*gusto* and *dis-gusto* is modelled. This *gusto*, as the motive power of vital energy which permeates the whole universe, plays a significant part in these last two cantos centred on aesthetic depictions of the recreated and harmonious world. As Hazlitt relates *gusto* to 'passion' in 'On *Gusto*,' Shelley, in *Queen Mab*, values highly the proper expression of 'passion,' which is indispensable to the exertion of the human faculty of sensibility. Although this 'passion' has the potential to turn into a negative feeling, in this utopian society, 'passion' functions properly through the concept of *mens sana in corpore sano*: 'Peace cheers the mind, health renovates the frame; [...] Reason and passion cease to combat there' (VIII 225-31). In this manner, 'the spirit,' as a counterpart of 'the sense / Of outward' (IX 155-56) evolves '[n]ew modes of passion' (IX 157).

In Canto VIII, the harmony between soul and body through the power of *gusto* is sensuously portrayed by a musical metaphor:

Love, freedom, health, had given  
 Their ripeness to the manhood of its prime,  
 And all its pulses beat  
 Symphonious to the planetary spheres:  
 Then dulcet music swelled  
 Concordant with the life-strings of the soul;  
 It throbbed in sweet and languid beatings there,  
 Catching new life from transitory death,—  
 [.....]  
 Was the pure stream of feeling  
 That sprung from these sweet notes,  
 And o'er the Spirit's human sympathies  
 With mild and gentle motion calmly flowed. (VIII 15-22, 27-30)

Supported by 'Love, freedom, health' (15) harmonised with 'the planetary spheres' (18), the 'pulses' of 'manhood' (15-16) transform into the 'pulses' that beat the rhythm of 'dulcet music' (19) flowing in the universe. This music is in tune with 'the life-strings of the soul' (20). This world in harmony is not an eternal paradise at all. Rather, it is a temporal world in which 'life' and 'death' serve as the musical motif of this heavenly music.<sup>71</sup> In such a symphony of 'sweet notes' (27), as the human 'beat' and 'throb' play out a variable tempo, 'the pure stream of feeling' (27) flows gently 'o'er the Spirit's human sympathies / With mild and gentle motion' (29-30). There the physical and mental 'motion' (30), harmoniously united into one flow, enhances the harmony between the body and the soul 'in [the] first luxury of health' (37) and is 'resonant with bliss' (103).<sup>72</sup> This flow of the metrical rhythm is interwoven into the poetic form itself, into the flow of lines composed by what Shelley calls 'blank heroic verse' and 'blank lyrical measure' based on iambic pentameter (*LPBS* 1: 352).<sup>73</sup>

In this way, for Shelley's utopian society, the power of live sensations is

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<sup>71</sup> Later on, this dichotomy of life and death is further examined: 'Life is its state of action [...]; Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom, / That leads to azure isles and beaming skies / And happy regions of eternal hope' (IX 158, 161-63). All human 'action' (IX 158) is based on the ultimate power of Necessity in the form of attraction, love as the source of sympathy, or rather Eros, which means both love and life in the latter Shelley's poetics. I shall return to this concept of Eros in Chapters V and VI. For the recurring and interactive dynamics between life and death in the form of creation and self-destruction, see also Chapter IV of this thesis. For the relationship between music and nerves in the context of eighteenth-century science, see also Rousseau, *Nervous Acts* 46-54.

<sup>72</sup> See Morton, *SRT* 52-56, 85-99. This analogy between the pulse of nerves and musical strings must be influenced by David Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749), which he ordered in 1812 (*LPBS* 1: 319). This analogy of musical strings for the human nerves recurrently appears in Shelley's later writings such as 'On Love' and *A Defence of Poetry*. See also Chapter III and Chapter VI of this thesis.

<sup>73</sup> For a general study of music images and a recurrent music motif in Shelley's poetry, see Paul A. Vatalaro, *Shelley's Music: Fantasy, Authority, and the Objective Voice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

indispensable, or the world grows into an icy spiritual wasteland in accordance with the human's 'chilled and narrow energies, his heart, / Insensible to courage, truth, or love'(VIII 149-50).<sup>74</sup> In 'Note 16,' Shelley discusses the possibility of human perfectibility through the power of sensibility:

Time is our consciousness of the succession of ideas in our mind. Vivid sensation, of either pain or pleasure, makes the time seem long, as the common phrase is, because it renders us more acutely conscious of our ideas. If a mind be conscious of an hundred ideas during one minute, by the clock, and of two hundred during another, the latter of these spaces would actually occupy so much greater extent in the mind as two exceed one in quantity. If, therefore, the human mind, by any future improvement of its sensibility, should become conscious of an infinite number of ideas in a minute, that minute would be eternity. I do not hence infer that the actual space between the birth and death of a man will ever be prolonged; but that his sensibility is perfectible, and that the number of ideas which his mind is capable of receiving is indefinite. (*CPPBS* 2: 294)

The passage shows the potential of human perfectibility through the power of sensibility, which extends the capacity of the human mind, human and the power of various kinds of thinking. The power of sensibility enables the human mind to experience 'an infinite number of ideas in a minute.' The improvement of sensibility is helped by the practice of vegetarianism in *Queen Mab*.<sup>75</sup>

Shelley's cosmology, described through the harmonious music of the spheres, is influenced by Pythagorean philosophy (as seen later in lines, IX 146-70), which is also

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<sup>74</sup> In *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, Alan Bewell points out that in describing the frozen earth, Shelley borrows Hippocrates's climatological ideas, which 'divides the world into three primary environmental zones—the polar, the tropical, and the temperate' (213-15).

<sup>75</sup> For the relation of this passage to Godwin's theory of human perfectibility, see Duff, *Romance and Revolution* 100.

one of the major sources for Shelley's vegetarianism.<sup>76</sup> Far from base materialism and sensualism, real happiness and luxury are extolled in this imagined utopia, where no blood is shed or spilt for the sustenance of humans or animals:

The lion now forgets to thirst for blood;  
There might you see him sporting in the sun  
Beside the dreadless kid; his claws are sheathed,  
His teeth are harmless, custom's force has made  
His nature as the nature of a lamb. (VIII 124-28)<sup>77</sup>

Since there is no need 'for blood' (124), the lion's 'teeth' are rendered 'harmless' (127).

The sensuous harmony organically unifies all earthly beings including the chord of the human body and mind: 'Here now the human being stands adorning / This loveliest earth with taintless body and mind' (VIII 198-199). This idea of a vegetarian utopia is supplemented by Shelley's 'Note 17' which further connects sensuous expression with his gastro-politics:

There is no disease, bodily or mental, which adoption of vegetable diet and pure water has not infallibly mitigated, wherever the experiment has been

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<sup>76</sup> On 26th November 1813, Shelley wrote to Hogg that he was interested in 'the Orphic and Pythagorean system of diet' (*LPBS* 1: 380). For other sources of Shelley's vegetarian thought, see Morton, 'The Pulses of the Body,' 71-74. For a summary of the influence of various vegetarian discourses of Shelley's time on his poetry and ecological thought, see Tristram Stuart, *The Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to Modern Times* (2006; New York: Norton, 2007) 372-98.

<sup>77</sup> For a further discussion of animal rights in the age of Romanticism, see David Perkins, 'Religion and Animal Rights in the Romantic Era,' *The Fountain Light: Studies in Romanticism and Religion: in Honor of John L. Mahoney*, ed. J. Robert Barth (New York: Fordham UP, 2002) 1-21; David Perkins, *Romanticism and Animal Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003); and William Stroup, 'Henry Salt on Shelley: Literary Criticism and Ecological Identity,' *Romanticism and Ecology*, ed. James McKusick, November 2001, *Romantic Circle Praxis Series*, 10 March 2011 <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/ecology/stroup/stroup.html>>. For the development of the human-animal relationship and animal rights from sixteenth-century to nineteenth-century Britain, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon, 1983). This title is for the American edition and the British edition has an alternative title, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitude in England 1500-1800*.

fairly tried. [...] On a natural system of diet, old age would be our last and our only malady; the term of our existence would be protracted; we should enjoy life, and no longer preclude others from the enjoyment of it; all sensational delights would be infinitely more exquisite and perfect; the very sense of being would then be a continued pleasure, such as we now feel it in some few and favoured moments of our youth. By all that is sacred in our hopes for the human race, I conjure those who love happiness and truth, to give a fair trial to the vegetable system.

(*CPPBS* 2: 304; *Vindication* 83-84)

In a passage filled with blissful words such as ‘enjoy,’ ‘enjoyment,’ ‘delight,’ ‘exquisite,’ and ‘pleasure,’ Shelley argues how effectively vegetarianism works to construct an ideal society, in which ‘all sensational delights’ play a crucial part. For Shelley, vegetarianism and sensuous experience are inseparable from one another for the reason that the vegetarian system of *Queen Mab*, by virtue of the ‘sacred sympathies of soul and sense’ (IX 36), improves and enhances somatic sensibility according to the principle of vegetarianism based on the notion of *mens sana in corpore sano*.

Consequently, Shelley’s practice and praise of a simple vegetarian diet constructs a powerful gastro-politics. Again, in ‘Note 17,’ Shelley asserts the necessity of vegetarianism to stimulate the nervous system, especially:

Irritability, the direct consequence of exhausting stimuli, would yield to the power of natural and tranquil impulses. He will no longer pine under the lethargy of ennui, that unconquerable weariness of life, more to be dreaded than death itself. He will escape the epidemic madness, which broods over its own injurious notions of the Deity, and ‘realize the hell that priests and beldams feign.’ [...] He will find, moreover, a system of simple diet to be a system of perfect epicurism. (*CPPBS* 2: 309; *Vindication* 87)



As an anti-gastronomy against the *gourmet* establishments of his time, Shelley proposes his own vegetarian gastronomy as a real and ‘perfect epicurism’ in the original sense of *ataraxia*, ‘a perfect mental peace,’ defined by Epicurus.<sup>78</sup> Shelley’s gastro-politics are implemented through the concept of pleasure conflated with *gusto* as aesthetic taste. In Shelley’s epicurean gastro-politics, the real ‘pleasure of taste’ exceeds ‘the lethargy of ennui, that unconquerable weariness of life’ or ‘the pleasures of the table’ along with ‘the hypocritical sensualist at a lord-mayor’s feast’ (*CPPBS* 2: 309; *Vindication* 88).

### **A Poetics of (Dis)Gusto**

Shelley’s ideal society built on his gastro-politics discussed in ‘Note 17’ can only be realised in the future. In the last scene of *Queen Mab*, this ideal vision is left to Ianthe, who wakes from the dream-vision that Mab showed to Ianthe’s soul. This kind of dream-vision finds a precedent in its moral intensity and depiction of an ideal society of the future in Milton’s account of the revelation that Adam and Eve are shown by the arch-angel, Michael, in *Paradise Lost* (Book XI, XII).<sup>79</sup> It may seem odd to compare Shelley’s anti-religious poem to *Paradise Lost*, but both poets share similar objections to institutionalised religion. Shelley, in fact, asserts that ‘Milton’s poem alone will give permanency to the remembrance of its absurdities [of institutionalised Christianity]’

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<sup>78</sup> For an exposition of Epicurean philosophy in Shelley’s philosophical ideas, see Michael A. Vicario, *Shelley’s Intellectual System and Its Epicurean Background* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>79</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2007) 645-70.

(‘Note 16’ 287). In the closing lines of *Queen Mab*, Adam and Eve are glimpsed in the figures of Ianthe and her lover, Henry, as a couple charged with the renovation of their society. The moment when Ianthe returns to her body, awaking before the eyes of the kneeling Henry, perfectly embodies an ideal state of health in both the human body and soul on earth:

The Body and the Soul united then,  
A gentle start convulsed Ianthe’s frame:  
Her veiny eyelids quietly unclosed;  
Moveless awhile the dark blue orbs remained:  
She looked around in wonder and beheld  
Henry, who kneeled in silence by her couch,  
Watching her sleep with looks of speechless love,  
And the bright beaming stars  
That through the casement shone. (IX 232-40)

Everything contained in this space ceases to move within Shelley’s silently depicted tableau. While patiently waiting, Henry, with whom Shelley himself identifies, hears only the sound of Ianthe’s pulse or convulsions caused by the reunion of her ‘Body and Soul.’ Perhaps, this scene offers a glimpse of Shelley’s hope that such convulsions will translate into those future convulsions of a society which will struggle to aspire towards the ideal state of *mens sana in corpore sano*—the quintessential happiness of human society—posited in this philosophical poem.<sup>80</sup> Ianthe’s opening eyes as ‘the dark blues orbs’ mirror the regenerated earth filled with love and sympathy for others.

Like Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, Ianthe and Henry—as personae of Harriet

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<sup>80</sup> In considering whether this scene is a happy ending or not, Christopher R. Miller reads a possibility of the couple’s consummation here. Christopher R. Miller, ‘Happy Ever After?: The Necessity of Fairy Tale in *Queen Mab*,’ Weinberg and Webb, 69-84.

and Shelley—are expected to re-capture this utopian vision through their own discerning powers of *gusto* and *dis-gusto*. Yet it is hardly possible to achieve this ideal in reality either on a material or immaterial level. This is not only because it takes a longer time to reform society (actually Shelley gave up his own practice of vegetarianism within a year), but also because in Shelley's poetics, language itself is incapable of depicting perfectly this hoped for ideal society. The involuntary and uncontrollable aspects of poetic inspiration (also governed by *gusto* and *dis-gusto*) always prevent Shelley the poet from fully shaping into poetic form the fluctuating emotions he feels inside and desires to express. Similarly, Morton comments on the relations between 'the Fairy Mab's unfolding of a future utopia' and the imagery of eating (or vomiting) by quoting the following lines: 'Time! [...] Render thou up thy half-devoured babes' (*SRT* 84; *Queen Mab* VIII 3, 5). To highlight this sudden and violent emergence of a 'revolutionary prophecy,' Morton detects a resemblance between this line and Demogorgon's speech in *Prometheus Unbound*: 'If the abysm / Could vomit forth its secrets' (*Prometheus Unbound* II iv 114).<sup>81</sup>

Nevertheless, the most important verb here is 'vomit', which underlines the poet's ability to voice—through the creative power residing in poetic form—something formless that gorges his stomach. As Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* later puts it, poetry provides 'thoughts of ever new delight' which 'form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food' (517). Such a conception of poetic creation

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<sup>81</sup> See also Morton, *SRT* 84.

reaches beyond the repulsive feeling of *dis-gusto*, one which the poet tried and failed to ruminate, ingest, and digest when confronting social corruptions in *Queen Mab*. Shelley elaborates on the relationship of both the palate and tongue, when articulating the irreducibility of poetic language in *A Defence of Poetry*:

Obscenity, which is ever blasphemy against the divine beauty in life, becomes, from the very veil which it assumes, more active if less disgusting: it is a monster for which the corruption of society for ever brings forth new food, which it devours in secret. (*SPP* 521)

In aesthetic experience, poetic inspiration both visits and evades the poet's mind because it is 'beyond all expressions' at that instant (*SPP* 532). Yet the 'pleasure' that poetry arouses in the poet is all the more reason for Shelley—through his own sensibilities—to hold on to the potentiality of poetic language to create the world anew through the creative power of 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world' (*SPP* 535). Although vacillating between anxiety and hope, Shelley never loses his passion to reform society through poetry. In this respect, the last scene of *Queen Mab* offers a glimpse of Shelley beginning to formulate his early poetics of sensibility comprised of physiology, psychology and aesthetics. These will be central to the rest of Shelley's mature career as a philosophical poet. The 'bright beaming stars' (XI 239) of the night are the very sign of a hoped for future, the light of which, shining 'through the casement' (IX 240) or poetic frame, warmly illuminates—as well as enlightens—the allegorical lovers' first steps towards their ideal goal.

### Chapter III

#### Hearing the Voice of the Wind: Shelley's 'Poesy' and the Psychology of the Auditory in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc'

The figs fall from the trees, they are good and sweet; and as they fall, their red skin ruptures. I am a north wind to ripe figs.

Thus, like figs, these teachings fall to you, my friends: now drink their juice and their sweet flesh! It is autumn all around and pure sky and afternoon.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—

#### 1. The Æolian Harp and Poetic Inspiration in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'

##### Some Versions of Poetic Form in Shelley's 'Intellectual Beauty'

This chapter analyses the representation of some super-sensible 'Power' depicted in Shelley's companion lyrics 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' both composed in 1816. Over recent years Shelley's use of poetic form has attracted considerable critical attention. William Keach's *Shelley's Style* (1984) addresses Shelley's poetics of indeterminacy and the arbitrary power of language. Ronald Tetreault's *The Poetry of Life* (1987) adopts a deconstructive analysis of literary form to shed new light on the intricacies of Shelley's artistic life as a poet.<sup>1</sup> More recently, Susan J. Wolfson's *Formal Charges* (1997) has reoriented formalist reading of Shelley by arguing that the shaping power of historical consciousness is inevitable in the formal

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<sup>1</sup> On Keach's reading of 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,' see Keach, *Shelley's Style* 119-20. Ronald Tetreault, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1987).

poetics of the Romantic era. Mark Sandy's *Poetics of Self and Form in Keats and Shelley* (2005), drawing on Nietzsche's philosophical ideas, examines the relationship between poetic form and the self in Shelley's poetry.

In spite of these various approaches in the history of Shelley studies, Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (1816) still remains something of a conundrum because of its thematic and formal complexity. The fact that Shelley's chosen 'form' has diverse and variable possibilities makes it all the more intriguing. Wasserman notes ethical and religious elements in the poetic form of the 'Hymn':

Shelley is not making a scrupulous adaptation of a literary convention, but, in the traditional sense of a hymn, is offering a sincere prayer to divinity as he understands it, and the religious language of the poem is the transfer of conventional Christian terminology to what Shelley would propose as the true religion.' (*Shelley* 192)

About a decade after Wasserman's reading, Richard Cronin, in *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts*, identifies in Shelley's 'Hymn' another literary genre of the ode which is influenced by eighteenth-century sceptical odes as well as Wordsworth's odes about religious conviction, for instance, the 'Immortality Ode' (230).<sup>2</sup> In view of these contradictory formal elements, Cronin regards Shelley as 'the prophet of a rhetorical figure,' who has an 'awareness that the ascription of divinity to Intellectual Beauty may be no more than a rhetorical device' (230). Stuart Curran also reaches a similar conclusion, arguing that the poetic form and the poet's invocation (*apostrophe*) of

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<sup>2</sup> Kim G. Blank also addresses the motif of transience and permanence shared between Shelley's 'Hymn' and Wordsworth's 'Intimations Ode' and 'Tintern Abbey.' Kim G.. Blank, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority* (London: Palgrave, 1988) 167-71.

Intellectual Beauty, which ‘ostensibly desires the constant presence of the power,’ ironically, underlines its absence, because the poem ‘draws back from the identity it claims to embrace, onto a middle ground that is defined only by what it is not.’<sup>3</sup>

With these critical debates in mind, this chapter revisits the alleged formal predicament of Shelley’s ‘Hymn.’ My approach attends both to poetic genre and to the intellectual and invisible entity portrayed by Shelley and the poem’s relation to other kinds of poetic form. These include technical patterns (such as metre, rhyme, and their arrangements) as well as ‘inner form’ and ‘structure’ at work in the ‘Hymn’ through figurative language. As summarised by Frederick Garber in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, the term ‘form’ in European poetry is affiliated to Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy.<sup>4</sup> In Garber’s account, the concept of *form* proposed by both Plato and Aristotle is assumed to be the cause of completion and fulfilment as ‘telos [which] has to do not only with ending but with a consummation which is completeness’ (420). Aristotle’s form, according to Garber, however, has more to do with the ‘intrinsic’ and ‘informing principle’ within the matter, rather than some ‘external or transcendental’ entity (420).<sup>5</sup>

Shelley’s poetic inner form is interrelated with this divine and intellectual principle as indicated by the poem’s title, ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.’ The *OED*

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<sup>3</sup> Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (1986; New York: Oxford UP, 1989) 63.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Garber, ‘Form,’ *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan et al. (New York: MJF, 1993) 420-21.

<sup>5</sup> For more details of Aristotle’s formal principle along with imitation (*mimesis*) in his *Poetics*, see R. S. Crane, ‘Poetic Structure in the Language of Aristotle,’ *The Language of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1953) 42-54. See also Susan Stewart, ‘Romantic Meter and Form,’ *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry*, ed. James Chandler and Maureen N. McLane (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) 53.

defines the word 'intellectual' as that which is '[a]pprehended or apprehensible only by the intellect or mind (as opposed to by the senses), non-material, spiritual' (†1).<sup>6</sup> In addition, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed.) explains by quoting examples from Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus that the word 'intellect' is conceptually identified with the Greek word '*Nous*' meaning both 'reason, intellect' and '*Mind*,' as 'the active principle of the Universe' (5.b.). In this context, Shelley's 'Hymn' can be read in terms of a metaphysical belief in some transcendental entity and the word 'intellectual' has been associated with the (Neo-)Platonic tradition in Shelley studies.<sup>7</sup> In Shelley's own translation of Plato's *Symposium* (1818), frequent reference is made to both 'form' and 'intellectual beauty':

He who aspires to love rightly [...] would consider the beauty which is in souls more excellent than that which is in form. [...] The lover would then conduct his pupil to science, so that [...] contemplating thus the universal beauty, no longer like some servant in love with his fellow would he unworthily and meanly enslave himself to the attractions of one form, nor one subject of discipline or science, but would turn towards the wide ocean

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<sup>6</sup> In this context, the word 'intellectual' in the title of the 'Hymn,' could also be read as related to the imaginative power of human intellect itself, as Roland A. Duerksen remarks: 'Shelley considers the intellect to be the avenue through which whatever is good or beautiful becomes available to the individual.' I will further discuss this aspect of the 'intellect' together with the more divine and spiritual intellect in this chapter. Roland A. Duerksen, *Shelley's Poetry of Involvement* (New York: St Martin's, 1988) 16.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, Plotinus authored a tractate entitled 'On the Intellectual Beauty' contained in *The Enneads* (Eighth Tractate), but there is no proof that Shelley had read Plotinus's works. For a concise overview of (Neo-)Platonic readings of Shelley's concept of Intellectual Beauty, see Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest, Headnote, 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,' *POS*, 1:523-24; see also James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham: Duke UP, 1949) 196-206; M. H. Abrams *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1953; London: Oxford UP, 1971), 126-32; and C. E. Pulos, *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1962) 78-83. From a less Platonic point of view, Wasserman interprets the 'Hymn' as a manifestation of 'the One Mind,' the central concept of Shelley's 'intellectual philosophy' (*Shelley* 180-96). For other approaches to Shelley's understanding of Intellectual Beauty, see Fekete, 203-22; Hamilton, 'Literature and Philosophy' 169-71; and Vicario, 17-20, 53-92, 153-96.



of intellectual beauty, and from the sight of the lovely and majestic forms which it contains, would abundantly bring forth his conceptions in philosophy; until, strengthened and confirmed, he should at length steadily contemplate one science, which is the science of this universal beauty.<sup>8</sup>

As Michael O'Neill points out, Shelley's use of 'form' in this quotation encompasses both spiritual and material forms.<sup>9</sup> Put differently, by employing the word 'form' instead of *matter* or *body*, Shelley's translation attempts organically to unify form and matter as he strives poetically to realise this same unity in the 'Hymn.'<sup>10</sup>

Taking my point of departure from the re-definition of the term 'form' and 'Intellectual' in the 'Hymn,' I first consider Shelley's treatment of the transcendental and ineffable entity as a manifestation of inner form, the divine intellect in Western metaphysical terms.<sup>11</sup> We find that the metaphysical relationship between matter and form is symbolically embodied in the image of the Æolian harp, 'a stringed instrument adapted to produce musical sounds on exposure to a current of air' (*OED* 'Æolian' 2.a.). In Shelley's 'Hymn,' the poet's mind as an Aeolian harp is touched by some transcendental entity or presence of an ineffable and invisible breeze or breath in the

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<sup>8</sup> Plato, *The Banquet: Translated from Plato*, trans. Percy Bysshe Shelley, Notopoulos, 448-49.

<sup>9</sup> Michael O'Neill, 'Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet,' Weinberg and Webb, 241-42. O'Neill's argument is based on Notopoulos's notes on Shelley's translation of the *Symposium* (alongside its errors, variants, and interpolations). See Notopoulos, 550n448 (1.38), 551n449 (1.7), and 583n448 (1.28).

<sup>10</sup> It could be meaningful to compare Shelley's understanding of inner form with Coleridge's Schlegelian adoption of 'organic form' and 'mechanical form' in *Biographia Literaria*. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria (Two volume set)*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984) 7: 84n. M. H. Abrams pursues Coleridge's concept of organic form or organicism alongside a metaphor of a growing plant in German Romanticism and Coleridge's aesthetics. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 184-87, 197-213, 218-225. See also J. Drummond Bone, 'Organicism and Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*,' *Approaches to Organic Form: Permutations in Science and Culture*, ed. F.R. Burwick (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1987) 195-210.

<sup>11</sup> See Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) 84.

form of the wind. Shelley re-works this imagery later in *A Defence of Poetry*: ‘Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre’ (*Defence* 511).<sup>12</sup>

Yet, on another level, Shelley’s usage of ‘form,’ in the passage quoted from the *Symposium*, destabilises the hierarchical relationship between form and matter, a point crucial to Shelley’s poetic procedure in the ‘Hymn.’ The fact that Shelley adopts (or mistranslates) the word ‘form’ for ‘matter’ leads to an instability of the absolute superiority of form over matter in any traditional metaphysical sense and this point is inseparable from Shelley’s own poetic idiosyncrasy in the ‘Hymn.’ A further re-examination of figural depictions of Intellectual Beauty gradually transforms the music of that metaphysical Æolian harp into the physical and harmonious music or vocalisation of sounds produced through the pen or mouth of the poet-musician in praise of the divinity of poetry. Wasserman is, in this respect, right to sense in Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry* a ‘Poetics of Intellectual Beauty’ (204). An exploration of the process in which the central concept of Shelley’s ‘Hymn’ shifts from a super-sensible

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<sup>12</sup> The imagery of the Æolian harp was a prominent icon of the Romantic imagination and inspiration as demonstrated by Coleridge’s ‘Eolian Harp’ struck by ‘intellectual breeze’ (47) or the 1805 edition of *Prelude*, in which Wordsworth sees the divine power of Nature as ‘the breath of God’ (*Prelude* V 222). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘The Eolian Harp: Composed at Clevedon, Somersetshire,’ *Poetical Works I: Poems (Reading Text)*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, Kathleen Coburn and Bart Winer (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) 16: 231-35; and William Wordsworth *Prelude* 1805 ed., *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Clarendon: Oxford UP, 2000) 375-590 (hereafter all Wordsworth’s poems are taken from this edition). See also M. H. Abrams, ‘The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor,’ *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Oxford UP, 1975) 37-54. In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Abrams explains that the poet is the lyre, whereas the poem is ‘the chord of music’ created by ‘the reciprocation of external and internal elements, of both the changing wind and the constitution and tension of the strings’ (51). McGann interprets Coleridge’s poem as a recapitulation of ‘the philosophical and poetic legacy of enlightenment culture of sensation and sensibility’ (*The Poetics of Sensibility* 23).

entity (divine form) to the effect of poetic inspiration is revealing about a meta-figural aspect—those figures on figurative function—of Shelley’s ‘Hymn.’ This meta-figural dimension of the poem offers an embryonic glimpse into Shelley’s poetics that, eventually, ripens into *A Defence of Poetry*.<sup>13</sup>

### **‘Intellectual’ Form and the Æolian Instrument**

In Shelley’s ‘Hymn,’ the description of Intellectual Beauty is inseparable from the poem’s imagery of wind. The first and second stanzas of the ‘Hymn’ address this invisible Beauty as the ultimate entity of the universe that manifests itself through sensible aspects:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power  
 Floats though unseen amongst us,—visiting  
 This various world with as inconstant wing  
 As summer winds that creep from flower to flower.— (1-4)<sup>14</sup>

In the first stanza, rhyme b, ‘visiting’ (2) and ‘wing’ (3), emphasises the unseen emergence of this transcendental ‘Power’ (1) and the depiction of its invisible ‘wing’ is necessarily associated with the natural simile of summer ‘winds’ (4). For the ‘wing’ and ‘winds’ complement each other, as if they were organically unified through their shared verbal formation—the optical and acoustic similarity of the two words share—and

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<sup>13</sup> For innate intuition in terms of eighteenth-century associationism, see also Bate, *From Classic to Romantic* 101.

<sup>14</sup> All quotations from Shelley’s ‘Hymn’ and ‘Mont Blanc’ are taken from the following edition, in order to compare Version A with B of each poem. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 114-27 (hereafter this edition is abbreviated as *MW*). Version As of both the ‘Hymn’ and ‘Mont Blanc’ are quoted in this chapter.

through the physical action of lifting up. This imagery of a gentle summer breeze extends into the second stanza:

Spirit of BEAUTY, that doth consecrate  
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon  
Of human thought or form,—where art thou gone? (13-15)<sup>15</sup>

The 'Spirit' (13) is extremely revealing as the word 'Spirit' is etymologically derived from *spiritus* in Latin, which signifies 'breath.' The breath of the Spirit associated with light does 'shine upon'—or 'fall upon' in Version B—all 'human thought or form' (14-15). The simile of a summer breeze in the first stanza is, in the same manner, related to the breath of the Spirit which moves through all living things on earth.

This function of the Spirit as breath, in the third stanza, transforms into a second series of fleeting and insubstantial images:

Thy light alone—like mist o'er mountains driven,  
Or music by the night wind sent  
Through strings of some still instrument,  
Or moonlight on a midnight stream,  
Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream. (32-36)

Depicted through similes from nature such as 'mist' (32) and 'moonlight' (35), the Spirit's 'light' (32) is transformed into the more artistic imagery of the 'music by the night wind sent / Through strings of some still instrument' (33-34). This 'still

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<sup>15</sup> The ambiguity of the relationship between 'some unseen Power' and the 'Spirit of BEAUTY' has raised a question as to whether these two are identified as the same entity or not. See Kenneth Neill Cameron, *Shelley: the Golden Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1974) 242; Angela Leighton, *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 53; and Michael O'Neill, *The Human Mind's Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley's Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 34-35. Fry suggests that 'Power is the imaginal force, and Intellectual Beauty is its coloring' (*The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* 192).

instrument' is potentially identical to an Æolian lyre played by the Spirit's breath as the 'wind.' This association is made more explicit in another poem on a variation of the theme of Shelley's 'Hymn', entitled 'Frail Clouds Arrayed in Sunlight Lose the Glory' (1817):

There is a Power whose passive instrument  
Our nature is—a Spirit that with motion  
Invisible and swift its breath hath sent  
Amongst us, like the wind on the wide Ocean— (19-22)<sup>16</sup>

As Jack Donovan's editorial commentary notes, the analogy between the 'Spirit' and *spiritus* is not arbitrary in these lines (7n25). In Shelley's 'Hymn,' the breath of the Spirit synaesthetically combined with light does 'shine upon' all 'human thought or form' ('Hymn' 14-15). In other words, the Spirit (*spiritus*) gives to each earthly being a soul as an immanent form, and this function is suggested also by other words etymologically related to 'breath' such as *anima*, *psyche*, and *pneuma*. Abrams's 'The Correspondent Breeze' points out that the concept of the sacred breath prevalent in Romantic poetry is universally shared all over the ancient world, including 'the breath of the Lord' and 'the Holy Spirit' from the Biblical tradition in the *Book of Job* (4:13-16) and the *New Testament* (2:1-4) respectively (Abrams 45). Yet in the case of Shelley's 'Hymn,' the idea of the divine breath is not so closely related to the Christian doctrines as asserted in the third stanza: 'the name of God and ghosts and Heaven, / Remain the record of their [sages' or poets'] vain endeavour' (27-28) and are even 'poisonous names' (53). In a similar vein, a younger Shelley added to *Queen Mab* a

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<sup>16</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Frail Clouds Arrayed in Sunlight Lose the Glory,' *POS*, 2:7.

long note entitled ‘There is no God,’ which is regarded as an extended version of his former essay, ‘The Necessity of Atheism’ (1811).

It would be better, however, not to assume that Shelley is a staunch atheist, who denies any form of divinity. Even in the avowedly atheistic *Queen Mab*, Shelley holds to his belief in the first cause of the universe: the concept of necessity, equated to the ‘Soul of the Universe,’ ‘Spirit of Nature,’ or ‘mother of the world’ (VI 190, 197-98).<sup>17</sup> One possible source that helped Shelley, at this stage, form his cosmological notion is d’Holbach’s *The System of Nature*. Together with the etymological account of the word ‘breath’ as ‘*spiritus*,’ ‘*spiro*,’ and ‘*anima*,’ d’Holbach speculates that ‘[s]ome metaphysicians fearful of seeing too far into human nature, have compounded man of three substances, *body*, *soul*, and *intellect*—*Ζωµα* [*sic*], *ψυχη*, *Νοϋς*’ (50n [81n24]).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, d’Holbach conceives of the imagery of the Æolian harp from a psycho-physiological perspective: ‘Man may be compared to an Eolian harp, that issues sounds of itself, and should demand what it is that causes it to give them forth?’ (53 [87]). Shelley, as we noted earlier, attempted to conflate Godwinian idealism with French materialism, especially that of d’Holbach, when contemplating his own version of the system of Nature. Whether or not Shelley was directly influenced by d’Holbach’s explanation of the Æolian harp, such a view is consistent with Shelley’s earlier thinking on the subject of beauty. About the time of composing *Queen Mab*, Shelley wrote to

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<sup>17</sup> Cian Duffy identifies this concept of Necessity with the ‘unseen Power’ in the first stanza of the ‘Hymn.’ Cian Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 100-02.

<sup>18</sup> In the 1781 French edition, the word ‘*Ζωµα*’ is printed as ‘*Σωµα*.’

Elizabeth Hitchener (2. Jan. 1811): 'I have lately had some conversation with Southey which has elicited my true opinions of God—he says I ought not to call myself an Atheist, since in reality I believe that the Universe is God. [...] Southey agrees in my idea of Deity, the mass of infinite intelligence' (*LPBS* 1: 215).<sup>19</sup>

Shelley's idea of God as the divine intelligence is then, in *Alastor* (1815), integrated into the breath of the 'Great Parent' (45) which vibrates the speaker's 'heart' (49) as a 'lyre' (42).<sup>20</sup> Around the same period, Shelley directly portrays this relationship, in 'On Christianity' (1817), through the simile of a 'lyre' in order to express his interpretation of the divine concept of God which is not so far from that 'mass of infinite intelligence' written about in the letter to Hitchener:

There is a power by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will [...]. This power is God. And those who have seen God, have, in the periods of their purer and more perfect nature, been harmonized by their own will, to so exquisite a consentaneity of powers, as to give forth divinest melody when the breath of universal being sweeps over their frame.<sup>21</sup>

Here Shelley's analogy of 'some motionless lyre' played by the wind illustrates the relationship between a 'Power' or 'God' and humankind. As Spencer Hall comments, this passage about the divine melody produced by the resonance of the Spirit's breath with the human soul inside the body prefigures and corresponds to the imagery of the

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<sup>19</sup> Shelley seems to identify the term 'intelligence' with the term 'intellect,' which the *OED* defines as an 'intellect embodied; *spec.* † (a) a being or spirit possessing understanding (*obs.*)' (1b). So in this chapter I used these two terms interchangeably.

<sup>20</sup> For a comparative reading of the synaesthetic imagery of light and harmony in *Alastor* and the 'Hymn,' see O'Malley, 36-40.

<sup>21</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'On Christianity,' *PWPBS*, 1: 251-52.

‘still instrument’ in the third stanza of the ‘Hymn.’<sup>22</sup> In Shelley’s poetics in the ‘Hymn,’ through the imagery of the Æolian instrument, the transcendental intellect provides everything with ‘form’—like Aristotle’s concept of *eidos*—which ‘consecrates’ and animates all earthly things, giving ‘grace and truth to life’s unquiet dreams’ (36).

Taking its cue from the hymn as a genre originally associated with the form of religious songs in praise of gods and goddesses, Shelley’s ‘Hymn’ is to be ‘dedicate[d]’ (61) to the divine Beauty of ‘awful LOVELINESS’ (71). In this sense, the Spirit’s light is part of ‘the truth / Of nature’ (77-78). The divine intellect is the absolute presence, which the speaker can seek out and worship in ‘every form containing thee’ (82). This point is summarised in Shelley’s ‘On Christianity’:

Permit, therefore, the spirit of this benignant principle [of the Universal God] to visit your intellectual frame, or, in other words, become just and pure [...]. The universal Harmony or Reason [i.e. *Nous* or Intellect] which makes your passive frame of thought its dwelling in proportion to the purity and majesty of its nature, will instruct you if ye are willing to attain that exalted condition, in what manner to possess all the objects necessary for your material subsistence. All men are invocated to become thus pure and happy. All men are called to participation in the community of nature’s gifts. (*PWPBS* 1: 267)

This analogy of the Æolian lyre touched by the divine breath reveals Shelley’s own preference for employing the particular imagery of the Æolian instrument. By the time of composing the ‘Hymn,’ Shelley had already established the imagery of the Æolian harp as a symbol of human thought touched or inspired by a transcendental ‘Spirit’ in

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<sup>22</sup> Spencer Hall, ‘Power and the Poet: Religious Mythmaking in Shelley’s “Intellectual Beauty,”’ *Keats-Shelley Journal* 32 (1983): 131. See also David Lee Clark’s note to Shelley’s ‘Essay on Christianity’ (*SP* 202n13).



the form of a breeze. However, this is not the full extent of Shelley's use of Æolian harp imagery, as this image provides a cornerstone to his poetics of sensibility.

### **The Half-Divine Form: From the 'Still Instrument' to the 'Trumpet of a Prophecy'**

The fourth stanza of the 'Hymn' describes the youthful speaker's search for the source of the divine breath or supernatural voice. The aural sense is as important as the sense of sight here. He 'sought for ghosts'—the spectral—at first (49), not merely to be seen, but rather to be heard in '[h]opes of high talk with the departed dead' (52). In this context, there is a critical moment that foreshadows hearing the voice:

at that sweet time when winds are wooing  
All vital things that wake to bring  
News of buds and blossoming,— (56-58)

This trope indicates that these 'winds' (56) possess a rejuvenating power as *spiritus*, indicating the Spirit's voice as divine breath, which is implied by the Æolian harp in the third stanza. Then the speaker, finally, faces the shadow of the Spirit in the following supernatural experience:

Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;  
I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy! (59-60)

In this moment, the youthful-speaker intuitively hears the voice as a response from 'some sublimer world' (25) that he had been evoking without being 'heard' (54). In the exact moment when the Spirit's 'shadow fell on' (59) him, his shriek in 'ecstasy' (60) caused by their spiritual union resonates with that very transcendental voice hoped for.

As such, the youthful poet's calling to hear the transcendental voice is to be fulfilled in their communion. The transcendental voice of Intellectual Beauty as the universal Mind or Reason (*Nous*) is associated with a metaphysical belief in the *logos*—the origin of voice and language—as the absolute truth. Here the adolescent speaker's unarticulated shriek verifies his supernatural experience of the original and transcendental voice as the *logos*.<sup>23</sup>

However, in Shelley's 'Hymn,' the metaphysical or theological existence of Intellectual Beauty is not proved conclusively, as there is no evidence to verify the speaker's mystical encounter with Intellectual Beauty.<sup>24</sup> Without physical evidence, the speaker's transcendental experience remains subjective and arbitrary. Edward E. Bostetter addresses this unstable factor of the transcendental status of ultimate truth in Romantic poetry. In relation to the same motif of the divine breeze, Bostetter defines, unlike Abrams, the Romantic poet as a divine ventriloquist practicing an egotistic solipsism, 'projecting his own voice as the voice of ultimate truth.'<sup>25</sup> To be sure, Shelley's attitude in the period of writing *Queen Mab* might have been applicable to

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<sup>23</sup> Making use of (French) linguistic terms, Fry understands this interplay between the Spirit of Beauty and human mind in the following manner: "Power" becomes the always pre-existent *langue* that "governs thought," "Intellectual Beauty" becomes the *parole*, or discourse, of the signifier, and "human thought" is then the quasi-empirical nationality of conscious life that fancies itself to be the originary signified' (*The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* 193).

<sup>24</sup> In the Note 13 of *Queen Mab*, Shelley refers to something similar to this argument on the existence of a God as a creator of the universe: 'The evidence of the senses. If the Deity should appear to us, if he should convince our senses of his existence, this revelation would necessarily command belief. Those to whom the Deity has thus appeared have the strongest possible conviction of his existence. But the God of Theologians is incapable of local visibility' (*CPPBS* 2: 265). This passage is, presumably, based on his reading of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and 'Of Miracles.'

<sup>25</sup> Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron*, 2nd ed. (1963; Seattle: U of Washington P, 1975) 4.

this kind of ventriloquism: ‘God [...] / Himself the creature of his worshippers’ (VII 26, 28). Yet it is impossible to prove whether the Romantic poets, solipsistically, assumed that ‘the universe existed as he imagined it’ (Bostetter 4).

Whether or not the Spirit of Beauty as God really exists in the world of the ‘Hymn,’ one can say at least that the absence-presence of the invisible Spirit’s representation is inextricable from that of the speaker’s voice, which creates the images through and from his sense perception. Intellectual Beauty is represented as a super-sensible—invisible, inaudible, and intuitive—entity, as suggested by the words ‘like’ and ‘as,’ which appear five times and once respectively in the first stanza. The speaker of the ‘Hymn’ tries in vain to depict this super-sensible entity through the tropes of sensuous and ephemeral things such as ‘moonbeams’ (5), ‘memory of music’ (10), and ‘rainbows’ (19), all of which are barely tangible and temporal entities lasting only ‘for some uncertain moments’ (38). This sequence of similes underlies the mysterious and elusive status of the Spirit and the negative theology central to the poem.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the reality of this invisible and metaphysical Beauty is produced only through the speaker’s invocation, *apostrophe*, along with the chain of visible and physical sense-images connected with internal sensation. Even if the Spirit of Beauty is totally unrepresentable, this attempted representation inevitably relies on the speaker’s rhetorical device of *adynaton*. In this respect, the Spirit remains ‘unseen’ and

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<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, in ‘On Christianity’ Shelley writes that ‘[t]he universal being can only be described or defined by negatives, which deny his subjection to the laws of all inferior existences. Where indefiniteness ends idolatry and anthropomorphism begin’ (PWPBS 1: 252). See also Karen A. Weisman, *Imageless Truths: Shelley’s Poetic Fictions* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994) 46-47.

‘unknown,’ and can only ‘give whate’er these words cannot express’ (72). In the ‘Hymn,’ the idea of the interdependence between the divine intellect and human intellect is demonstrated in a way that suspends the absolute superiority of Intellectual Beauty over the human mind through a simile of darkness represented as the culmination of the poem’s mysterious similes for the Spirit:

Thou—that to human thought art nourishment,  
Like darkness to a dying flame! (44-45)

This darkness neither belongs to ‘a dark reality’ (48) nor ‘dark slavery’ (70), which smothers the ‘dying flame’ (45) insofar as it is analogous to ‘human thought’ (15). To illuminate this weak flame, the Spirit wraps it in the complete ‘darkness’ (45). The relationship between these two figures is, however, not simply unidirectional from ‘darkness’ to ‘a dying flame.’ Just as the light of the candle is rendered visible only by the darkness surrounding it, so the darkness becomes visible only through its contrast with the light.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the simile of the ‘darkness’ suggests that humankind is nourished by Intellectual Beauty, and by the same token, is also capable of nourishing and kindling the Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> In Tilottama Rajan’s deconstructive reading, these lines are an example of ‘the Shelleyan image [which] functions as conflictual but productive force’ in order to emphasise the fact that ‘an idea is embodied in a figure whose subtext generates a different and autonomous idea’ in the disseminative process of Shelley’s practice of imagination. As Rajan goes on to argue, this function of the figure of ‘darkness’ which nourishes the ‘dying flame’ is based on the subtext of the idea of darkness that it smothers light. For Rajan, the first meaning of darkness which smothers the light generates the second meaning of nourishment as a different idea which is unsynthesised into the first because each meaning ‘contains the principle of its own integrity.’ I appreciate Rajan’s idea of both the conflicting and productive force acting in Shelley’s ‘Hymn,’ but my interpretation is different from this on the grounds that the speaker of the ‘Hymn,’ in my reading, distinguishes the darkness as sacred nourishment from that of ‘a dark reality’ which will extinguish the ‘dying flame.’ Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990) 286-87.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Hughes, ‘Kindling and Dwindling: The Poetic Process in Shelley,’ *Keats-Shelley*

This point leads us to question the origin of *poiesis*, whether poetry comes from Intellectual Beauty, the author's mental faculty, divine inspiration, or other sources. This is because Shelley's poems retain a belief in the uncontrolled and uncontrollable power of poetic language as he later proposed in the 'Ode to the West Wind.' The dynamism of Shelley's *poiesis* makes unstable the aesthetic interpretation of the Æolian lyre imagery as a symbol of the organic unity of the ode and its formal structure. Such an uncontrollable element in *poiesis* can be considered something that occurs *outside* the poet's mind akin to those moments (or visitations) of poetic inspiration given by the Muse of poetry or other deities in the long tradition of Western poetry (especially in epic) as seen in such poems as the *Iliad*, *Faerie Queene*, and *Paradise Lost*.

In Shelley's *poiesis*, the '[u]ncontrollable' ('Ode to the West Wind' 47) questions to what extent the poet's own intellectual faculty is operating within the 'Hymn.' To explore this point further, we shall benefit by looking at the role of poetic *genius* in Shelley's poetics. 'The Daemon of the World' (1816), an abbreviated and revised version of *Queen Mab*, illustrates another form of intellect, *genius*, a divine spirit in Roman mythology corresponding to *daemon* in Greek mythology. The *genius* keeps an eye on earthly matters:

Genius has seen thee [Earth] in her passionate dreams,  
And dim forebodings of thy loveliness  
Haunting the human heart, have there entwined  
Those rooted hopes [...]. (II 12-15)<sup>29</sup>

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*Journal* 13 (1964): 16.

<sup>29</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Daemon of the World,' *POS*, 1: 489-508.

The 'Genius' watches humanity on 'Earth' through 'her passionate dreams.' The fact that Shelley feminises this 'Genius,' who traditionally is masculine in Greco-Roman mythology, suggests an affinity with his portrayal of the 'Spirit of Beauty' in the 'Hymn.' The 'Genius' renders the natural world more beautiful:

[...] the unmeasured notes  
Which from the unseen lyres of dells and groves  
The genii of the breezes sweep. (I 53-55)<sup>30</sup>

Like the Spirit of Beauty, the 'genii' floating between heaven and earth touch Nature's 'unseen lyres' (I 54). This imagery anticipates the famous phrase of the 'Ode to the West Wind': 'Make me thy lyre, even as the forest' (57). The role of Shelley's *genius* is closely akin to that of the Spirit of Beauty in the 'Hymn' because both illuminate the natural world as well as the human mind. In this sense, it is natural that J. R. Watson should recognise in Shelley's 'Hymn' a moment that 'look[s] beyond the physical landscape to a complex *genius loci*' around Lake Geneva, where Shelley composed the poem.<sup>31</sup>

For Shelley, both types of genius are associated with the visitation of inspiration which fires the human imagination. In his preface to *Alastor*, Shelley introduces the antagonist Poet as 'a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and

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<sup>30</sup> See also *Queen Mab*: 'Tis softer than the west wind's sigh; / 'Tis wilder than the unmeasured notes / Of that strange lyre whose strings / the genii of the breeze sweep' (I 50-53).

<sup>31</sup> J. R. Watson, 'Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and the Romantic Hymn,' *Durham University Journal* 85.2 (1993): 205. For more information about the English Romantic poets and landscape, see also J. R. Watson, *Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry* (London: Hutchinson, 1970).

majestic, to the contemplation of the universe' (*SPP* 72). Though used in a sense closer to that of a mental faculty, the very 'genius' of the youthful Poet impels him to his long quest for 'intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself' in order to see his ultimate 'vision in which he embodies his own imaginations' and this vision 'unites all of wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, philosopher, or the lover could depicture' (*SPP* 73). In so doing, the protagonist Poet's own intelligence—here equated to 'genius'—is more important for Shelley:

The intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of sense, have their respective requisitions on the sympathy of corresponding powers in other human beings. The Poet is represented as uniting these requisitions, and attaching them to a single image. (*SPP* 73).<sup>32</sup>

The Poet's 'intellectual faculties' consist of 'the imagination, the function of sense,' and 'sympathy,' through which the Poet attempts to approximate ideal beauty and truth in the world. This point is articulated in Eusebes's speech to Theosophus in *A Refutation of Deism*: 'Intelligence is that attribute of the Deity, which you hold to be most apparent in the Universe. Intelligence is only known to us as a mode of animal being. We cannot conceive intelligence distinct from sensation and perception, which are attributes to organized bodies' (*PWPBS* 1: 121). In the same way, Shelley's *poiesis* in the 'Hymn' is neither an utterly divine nor utterly human creation, as *poiesis* is an amalgam of an external and divine intellect and the intellectual faculty of the poet. This half-divine and half-human intelligence is identified with Shelley's representation of poetic genius through the inextricable interplay between divine and human genius, between heaven

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<sup>32</sup> See also d'Holbach, 1: 52 [1:86].

and earth, in 'The Daemon of the World' and *Alastor*.<sup>33</sup>

To understand fully this interplay between the two types of *genius*, it is helpful to look briefly at Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. In Section 46 entitled 'Fine art is the art of genius,' Kant states that:

where an author owes a product to his genius, he does not himself know how the *ideas* for it have entered into his head, nor has he it in his power to invent the like at pleasure, or methodically, and communicate the same to others in such precepts as would enable them to produce similar products. (Hence, presumably, our word *Genie* is derived from *genius*, as the peculiar guardian and guiding spirit bestowed upon a human being at birth, by the inspiration of which those original ideas were obtained.)

(*Critique of Judgement* 137 [194])

Genius is, according to Kant, an absolute otherness, which inspires the genius by entering into his mind. Kant goes on to explore the principle of spirit in section 49. For Kant, spirit is the 'principle [which] animates the soul' and 'this principle is nothing else than the faculty of presenting aesthetic ideas,' to which '*intuition* (representation of the imagination) can be adequate' (142-43). It is, Kant asserts, 'in the poetic art that the faculty of aesthetic ideas can show itself to full advantage' (142-3). By the same logic, the relationship between the intellectual breeze and the human soul in Shelley's 'Hymn' is interactive as depicted by the image of the 'dying flame' (I will discuss further the intersection between Kant and Shelley through the representation of 'Mont Blanc' in the next section of this chapter).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> According to Matthews and Everest's headnote to *Alastor*, the word 'Alastor' etymologically means an 'evil genius,' or a 'spirit of evil' (*POS*, 1:459).

<sup>34</sup> For details about the discourse of genius itself in the (Pre-)Romantic era from the viewpoint of organicist philosophy, see Abrams, *The Mirror and Lamp*, 184-225.



This interplay between divine and human *genius* or *intelligence* is later developed in *A Defence of Poetry*. To elucidate the process of mental action in *poiesis*, *A Defence of Poetry* begins by introducing a particular mental action between ‘Τὸ λογίζειν [*logizein*]’ and ‘Τὸ ποιεῖν [*poiein*],’ which Shelley translates as ‘reason and imagination’ (510). Interestingly, Shelley understands *poiein* as *imagination* rather than *making* and so he equates *poiesis* with *making*. Reason is regarded as the principle of ‘analysis’ and imagination as the principle of ‘synthesis.’ By using the analogy of what he calls ‘the algebraical representations,’ Shelley argues that reason identifies ‘the differences’ between things, whereas imagination identifies ‘the similitude of things,’ which is why imaginative perception is so closely identified with figures of speech such as metaphor and simile (510).<sup>35</sup> This enables the poet to ‘create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized’ (512). Shelley explains this differential-integral function with several illustrative metaphors: ‘Reason is to Imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance’ (*Defence* 510-11). In this context, *logizein*, pertains to the *logos*, intelligence and, in accordance with this, the Spirit of Beauty as the divine *logos* or intelligence can also be internalised into the poetic mind as intellectual intuition. This relationship between reason and imagination explained by Shelley illustrates the function of Shelley’s *poiesis*—just as Shelley defines poetry as ‘the expression of the Imagination’: *poiein* is inextricable from *poiesis*.

At the same time, in Shelley’s poetics, the *poiein* cannot exist without recourse to the

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<sup>35</sup> Bryan Keith Shelley points out that reason is associated with the ‘calculating principle,’ whereas imagination is associated with the ‘creative faculty.’ Bryan Keith Shelley, ‘The Synthetic Imagination: Shelley and Associationism,’ *The Wordsworth Circle* 14.1 (1983): 71.

*logizein*, the *logos*.

Immediately after his theory of mental action, Shelley elaborates upon the analogy of the human as ‘an instrument’ powered by ‘internal and external impressions’ (the Æolian lyre) to verify poetry as an innate ability (511):

But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre; and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre. (*SPP* 511)<sup>36</sup>

We can see the same workings in the ‘Hymn,’ where the organically unified imagery of this Æolian instrument produces a strain of music, that is, the hymn written in verse.<sup>37</sup>

This passage suggests that as the ‘lyre’ is the human, so the ‘melody’ is poetry and the ‘musician’ is the poet. The poet is, however, no longer a mechanical instrument. Both the musician and the mechanical instrument produce the melody, but the musician relies on the pleasure of creation to a certain extent, whereas the machine cannot feel emotions or create (compose) music alone.

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<sup>36</sup> This passage may be influenced by Hume’s *A Dissertation on the Passions* (1757): ‘Now, if we consider the human mind, we shall observe, that, with regard to the passions, it is not like a wind-instrument of music, which, in running over all the notes, immediately loses the sound when the breath ceases; but rather resembles a string-instrument, where, after each stroke, the vibrations still retain some sound, which gradually and insensibly decays.’ David Hume, *A Dissertation on the Passions, A Dissertation on the Passions; The Natural History of Religion*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 4. Thomas Gray is one of Shelley’s predecessors who dealt with the relations of poesy to the Æolian lyre: ‘Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake, / And give to rapture all thy trembling strings’ (‘The Progress of Poesy’ 1-2).

<sup>37</sup> For details of Hartley’s analogy of a music instrument for the human mind in conjunction with associationism, see Chapter VI. Wasserman says that ‘Shelley’s so-called Platonic doctrine of inspirational apprehension of the One [‘pure form’] is coherently complemented by an associational psychology’ (*Shelley* 218).

### **A Perceptive ‘Lustre’ and the Trans-Forming of the Spirit of Beauty**

The speaker of the ‘Hymn’ is no longer just the recipient of a transcendental voice (on breath). Following the transition from the experience of transcendental Beauty to the pleasure of *poiesis* (capturing beauty in poetry), what the ‘unseen Power’ signifies in the ‘Hymn,’ also turns from the inner form endowed by the Spirit of Beauty as the divine breeze to the inspiration (Latin: *in* + *spirare* = to breathe) of the poet as a musician producing harmonious melody through his sense organs. Shelley affirms, in *A Defence of Poetry*, this idea of inspiration with his sense of ‘the visitations of the divinity in man’:

Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them or in language or in form sends them forth among mankind, bearing sweet news of kindred joy to those with whom their sisters abide—abide because there is no portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things. Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man. (*SPP* 532)

Here Shelley, intriguingly, still expects ‘the visitations,’ rather than having realised them already.<sup>38</sup> In this respect, the transcendental Beauty of the ‘Hymn’ relates more to poetic inspiration than to poetry itself. In Shelley’s concept of poetry, the poet’s sympathy and bodily sensations—both of which are tightly intertwined with inspiration—enable him to grasp the most beautiful essence or ‘spirit’ of ‘every form.’

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<sup>38</sup> In ‘Romanticism and the Question of Poetic Form,’ Wolfson foresees Shelley’s ultimate frustration with his poetic practice, citing Shelley’s later poem *Epipsychidion* (149).

In *A Defence of Poetry* the process of *poiesis* is fully embodied in the closing stanza of the 'Hymn.' Since the hymn as a poetic form, traditionally, ends with a 'prayer and farewell' to the object of the hymn, the final stanza of Shelley's 'Hymn' is closed by the parting of the poet from the Spirit of Beauty.<sup>39</sup> Yet this poetic form of farewell is no mere formality, but necessary to proclaim Shelley's devotion to a new kind of poetics:

The day becomes more solemn and serene  
When noon is past—there is a harmony  
In autumn, and a lustre in its sky,  
Which through the summer is not heard or seen,  
As if it could not be, as if it had not been! (73-77)

The phrase 'noon is past' (74) seems to allude to the speaker's past 'youth' (79) which had culminated in his union with the Spirit of Beauty, the moment when 'I vowed that I would dedicate my powers / To thee and thine' (61-62). The 'more solemn and serene' (73) air suggests that the poet's worship of the Spirit of Beauty is not merely aesthetic ('serene'), but also ascetic ('solemn') because of his self-determination to exercise his powers on behalf of the world.<sup>40</sup> This turning point is described in the transition from summer to autumn which anticipates maturity or harvest. The speaker has already realised something momentous is occurring in this harmonious afternoon of autumn. That 'lustre in its sky' (75) which the poet-speaker senses was not 'seen' (76) or even

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<sup>39</sup> Philip Robinson, 'Hymn,' Preminger and Brogan, 544.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Chernaik's remark on the poet's faith in the Spirit of Beauty is also ascetic for a different reason: 'the fact that knowledge depends upon sense perception alone, and hence is by definition limited, becomes the best, perhaps the only, justification for faith—even though the gods of such faith must be invented and faith itself be an act of will.' Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Cleveland: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1972) 40.

‘heard’ (76) during the summer as though ‘it could not be, as if it had not been!’ (77). The speaker’s use of the conditional clause and exclamation mark emphasises a sudden recognition of the autumn lustre as an epiphanic moment realised through the optical (of dazzle or shimmer) and auditory (of the Æolian harp) sensations. It is because this relation between lustre and human sensation implies that the source of the beautiful—which used to belong to the Spirit of Beauty, the external and super-sensible (‘sublimar’) entity—becomes internalised into the speaker’s ‘solemn and serene’ mind now harmonised with the autumn air through physical sensations and poetic sensibility. In this sense, the poet of the ‘Hymn’ can feel the invisible existence of Intellectual Beauty—which originally entails intuitive recognition—only through his senses.

With the movement of the last stanza of the ‘Hymn,’ the focus is clearly shifting from the Spirit of Beauty as the divine form to the speaker’s speculative *poiesis*:

Thus let thy power, which like the truth  
Of nature on my passive youth  
Descended, to my onward life supply  
Its calm—to one who worships thee,  
And every form containing thee,  
Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind  
To fear himself, and love all human kind. (78-84)

The speaker has matured from a ‘passive youth’ (79) to an active poet who resolves to employ his own poetic ‘powers’ (61) interfused with the Spirit’s ‘power’ (78) in his ‘onward life’ (80). The beauty that ‘every form [is] containing’ (82) will be drawn through the speaker’s poetic form. Simultaneously, the Spirit’s ‘spells’ (83) will be

bequeathed to the speaker's poetic powers through the words that he spells out and then attempts to 'bind' (83) to the poetic form of the 'Hymn.' In a certain sense, the power of Beauty now resides not only in the object itself but also in the subject's mind, precisely as implied by his recognition of the lustre.<sup>41</sup> As Shelley writes in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, '[a] poet, is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others, and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both' (*SPP* 208). For the poet-speaker of the 'Hymn' as 'one who worships' (81) the Spirit of Beauty, the absence-presence of the Spirit still retains its mystical character by floating between subject and object.

The concluding stanza of the 'Hymn' concerned with the autumnal lustre shows the moment when the germ of Shelley's own poetics expounded in *A Defence of Poetry* begins to form. Here the 'Hymn' and *A Defence of Poetry* obviously refer to the same unknown 'Power,' the source of the 'evanescent visitations,' as Kenneth Neill Cameron suggests (*Shelley* 237). This internal feeling aroused by the external object is, I believe, the source of *poiesis*:

the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness: this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is

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<sup>41</sup> Forest Pyle claims that 'intellectual beauty is not to be confused with sensuous beauty; and thus the hymn is addressed not to the aesthetic as such—not to the sensory manifestation of the spirit—but to the spirit of beauty itself.' Yet my argument is that the 'Hymn' is, for Shelley, a turning point to become aware of the aesthetic in his poetics and a first step to formulate this poetics that is later manifested in *A Defence of Poetry*. In this sense, the 'Hymn' contains a grain of what Pyle calls 'the sensory manifestation of the spirit.' Forest Pyle, "'Frail Spells": Shelley and the Ironies of Exile,' *Irony and Clerisy*, ed. Elise White, August 1999, Para 7, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, 10 March 2011  
< <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/irony/pyle/frail.html>>.

developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure. (*SPP* 531)

In this respect, Shelley's Intellectual Beauty should be understood not as a metaphor for the ultimate source of *poiesis* itself, but rather as a kind of metonymy, namely, an agent who delivers inspiration to the poet. For the poet of the *Defence of Poetry*, the Spirit of Beauty still remains a 'messenger of sympathies' ('Hymn' 42), whereby Shelley's poetry, through both its physical and mental sensibility, 'strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms' (*SPP* 533). For this reason, '[p]oets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, the words which express what they understand not, the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire' (*PSS* 535).

Shelley's 'Hymn,' in this way, becomes a poetic manifestation of *A Defence of Poetry*, or some kind of overture to it, as a prose poem about poetry.<sup>42</sup> The last stanza of the 'Hymn' can be read as a fond farewell to the Spirit of Beauty, on whom the poet had once solely relied in his youth. The poet-speaker of the 'Hymn' can only find the lost voice of his youth recreated in the form of poetry and poetic memories.

## **2. The Voice of 'Poesy': The Process of Imagination in 'Mont Blanc'**

### **The Psychological Operation of the Sublime Beauty in *Poiesis***

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<sup>42</sup> O'Neill perceives the poetic artistry in Shelley's prose writing in the 'writing's rhythms,' which, 'with their balance of poise and power, are central to its achievement' ('Emulating Plato' 254).

In 'Mont Blanc,' Shelley's theory of *poiesis* and ideas about the faculty of sensibility is made more explicit than in Coleridge's 'Hymn: before Sun-Rise, in the Vale of Chamouni' (1802), which shares a number of preoccupations and formal affinities with Shelley's 'Hymn' and 'Mont Blanc.' There are essential differences between these poems by Coleridge and Shelley on Mont Blanc. Coleridge's 'Hymn' worships the 'Invisible' (16) and constantly emphasises the name of 'God' in lines 58 to 60. This poem invokes the power of eternity behind the mountain to such an extent that earthly time within the Arve ceases to be: 'Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty voice, / And stopped at once mid their maddest plunge! / Motionless torrents! silent cataracts!' (51-3)<sup>43</sup> Coleridge's speaker believes that everything in the vale is ruled by almighty God, and this belief culminates in a perfect silence transcending temporality which is compressed into the word '[m]otionless' (53). This is, for Coleridge, proof of an organic unity.<sup>44</sup>

By contrast, Shelley's 'Mont Blanc' emphasises both the outer dynamics of the landscape of nature and the ways in which nature's sublime and dynamic motion stirs the onlooker-poet's mind to stimulate his imagination.<sup>45</sup> Shelley's fascination with the

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<sup>43</sup> One of the earliest juxtapositions of Coleridge's Mont Blanc with Shelley's is Leavis's 'Shelley' in *Revaluation* (217-22).

<sup>44</sup> Esterhammer, however, interprets this poem differently with respect to some uncontrollable aspects of poetic language: 'despite his faith in a world-creating world-sustaining Logos in which comes through so strongly in prose works like *Aides to Reflection* and *Logic*, Coleridge's poetry betrays his doubt that the Logos might finally be nothing but a projection of fallible human voice' (226). See also Sally West, *Coleridge and Shelley: Textual Engagement* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 73-98.

<sup>45</sup> For a good summary of the concept of the sublime in English eighteenth-century aesthetics, see Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1935). For a crisp explanation of aesthetic and sublime emotions in eighteenth-century culture, see Bate, *From Classic to Romantic* 153-56. For the reception of



dynamic motion of Nature in 'Mont Blanc' comes from his experience of sublime beauty in the Alps. On 22 July 1816, Shelley enthusiastically wrote to Peacock about the landscape of Mont Blanc, the forests of which seemed 'inexpressibly beautiful—but majestic in their beauty' (*LPBS* 1: 496). The mountain excited 'a sentiment of extatic wonder, not unallied to madness,' a sentiment intensified because it was 'all one scene' (*LPBS* 1: 497). Shortly after this letter, Shelley published *History of a Six Weeks' Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland* (1817) where, in the preface, he accentuates how fascinating and inspiring the mountainous landscape had been impressed upon his mental faculties: 'The poem entitled 'Mont Blanc' [...] was composed under the immediate impressions of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects which it attempts to describe; and as an undisciplined overflowing of the soul, rests its claim to approbation on an attempt to imitate the untameable wilderness and inaccessible solemnity from which those feelings sprang.'<sup>46</sup> In the same manner, Shelley's poem praises the human emotion stimulated or stirred by Nature's motion. The mechanism of emotion stirred by Nature's motion is, as we have seen in the 'Hymn,' corresponds to the representation of the human mind as analogous to an

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Neo-classical sublime by the Romantic poets, see also Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* 26-31.

<sup>46</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland PWPBS*, 1: 180-81. See also Burke's discussion of 'Vastness' and 'Infinity' in *A Philosophical Enquiry* (66-68). In respect to this sublime effect of the high mountains caused by a sense of 'infinity,' Bode tracks this back to Thomas Burnet's *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681). Christoph Bode, 'A Kantian Sublime in Shelley: "Respect for Our Own Vocation" in an Indifferent Universe,' *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era, III*, ed. Kevin L. Cope and Laura Morrow (New York: AMS, 1997) 329-58. For the sound imagery and Burke's aesthetics of the sublime, see W. J. T Mitchell, 'Eye and Ear: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Sensibility,' *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (1986; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987) 116-46. For an aesthetical transition from Burke to Kant, see Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 55-96.

Æolian harp touched by the Spirit of Beauty as divine breeze.<sup>47</sup>

In 'Mont Blanc,' Shelley's imagination is stirred by the kinetic and auditory elements of Mont Blanc such as the sounds of flooding torrent, blowing winds and avalanche rumbling-like 'thunder' (*LPBS* 1: 497). I will examine the interrelations between the working of the human mind and these kinetic and acoustic effects.<sup>48</sup> By focusing on this point, my argument ponders the interrelation between physical and psychological (e)motion in Shelley's 'Mont Blanc.' In doing so, I shall indicate how Shelley's psychological description of 'Mont Blanc' (as well as in the 'Hymn') resonates with eighteenth-century intellectual history.<sup>49</sup> Shelley's fragmentary essay, *A Treatise on Morals*, which is underpinned by eighteenth-century moral philosophy, is central to this point. For Shelley, as well as the late eighteenth-century philosophers, psychology was a branch of moral philosophy (moral science) and metaphysics.<sup>50</sup>

### **From Motion to Emotion: *A Treatise on Morals* as a Transfiguration of 'Mont**

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<sup>47</sup> Abrams employing the words 'breeze' and 'breathing,' links the 'poetic mind' to the 'wind-harp' as 'the figurative mediator between outer motion and inner emotion' ('The Correspondent Breeze' 38).

<sup>48</sup> Susan Wolfson also pays attention to the auditory aspects of Shelley's 'Mont Blanc,' claiming that 'the sound of *sound* becomes the medium of conversation with the sensorium of the external world, not only its nonsemantic noises, but its auditorium of other voices, especially poets.' Susan J. Wolfson, 'Sounding Romantic: The Sound of Sound,' *Soundings of Things Done: The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson, April 2008, Para. 33, 22 February 2011 <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/soundings/wolfson/wolfson.html>>. The 'kinaesthetic' aspect in Shelley's poetry is discussed by Fogle in *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley* (95-98). This point was then extended by Keach in *Shelley's Style*, in which Keach takes a look at 'the rapid movements of the "awful scene"' in line 12-19 of 'Mont Blanc' (157-58). Nonetheless, the relations between mental and physical motion in 'Mont Blanc' is yet to be fully explored.

<sup>49</sup> For the influence of British empiricism on Shelley's *A Treatise on Morals*, see Harry White, 'Shelley's Defence of Science,' *Studies in Romanticism* 16.3 (1977): 319-30.

<sup>50</sup> For the general history of the rise of psychology around this period, see Reed, *From Soul to Mind* 22-37.

## **Blanc'**

The first stanza of 'Mont Blanc' describes the speaker's response to the vale of Chamonix. The lines begin with the poet's emotional reaction to the magnificent landscape:

The everlasting universe of things  
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,  
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—  
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs  
The source of human thought its tribute brings  
Of waters, —with a sound but half its own,  
Such as a feeble brook will oft assume  
In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,  
Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,  
Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river  
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves. (1-11)

This scene starts not with the landscape of the mountains, but with the metaphor of 'the mind' (2) with the metaphor of the 'secret springs' (4) as the origin of 'human thought' (5). The splendour and gloom of the stream are identified with a stream of consciousness, an inner flow of 'the mind' in which the reflection of the water is inextricable from the reflecting mind. From line 6, this metaphor of the mind-current is gradually mixed into the sound of waters heard in the vale by the speaker. As the sound of waters grow louder, the feeble brook, born from those springs of 'human thought,' intermingles with the 'waterfalls' (9) and rapidly grows into 'a vast river' which 'ceaselessly bursts and raves' (11).

The torrent's violent motions and sounds become fiercer in the second stanza,

which further describes the metaphorical interfusion of the mind with the landscape of the 'Ravine of Arve' (12). The current of the mind rushes along the Ravine, passing through a sublimely tumultuous scene:

Thou many-coloured, many-voicèd vale,  
Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail  
Fast cloud shadows and sunbeams: awful scene,  
Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down  
From the ice gulfs that gird his secret throne,  
Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame  
Of lightning through the tempest;—thou dost lie,  
Thy giant brood of pines around thee clinging,  
Children of elder time, in whose devotion  
The chainless winds still come and ever came  
To drink their odours, and their mighty swinging  
To hear—an old and solemn harmony [...]. (13-24)

Here the tempestuous energy flowing in the mind is taken over by the ravine and Arve itself. The 'Power' (16) of the Arve from the glacier bursts 'like the flame / Of lightening through the tempest' (18-19). This paradoxical simile for the glacier heightens the impetuous movement of the 'awful scene' (15). At the same time, the description of old pine trees accentuates the tempestuous scene. Their verticality not only forms a contrast with the horizontal current of the fresh river, but also generates a stabilizing effect in the rapidity of Shelley's lines. As Keach argues, rhyme in 'Mont Blanc' is 'sufficiently irregular to help evoke the "untameable wildness" Shelley spoke of' (*Shelley's Style* 199). The rhyme of 'clinging' (19) and 'swinging' (23) also increases this dynamic by creating a tension between stillness and motion. The

‘chainless winds’ (22), which mediate between these vertical and horizontal powers, sway the pine-trees in order to taste ‘their odours’ (23) and hear the sounds that their ‘mighty swinging’ (23) produces. These create ‘an old and solemn harmony’ (24) of the optic, olfactory, and auditory senses in the ‘many-coloured, many-voiced vale’ (13).

This correspondence between the mind and the landscape grows more intense in the imagery of ‘many-coloured’ rainbows, which coalesces and harmonises with the ‘many-voiced’ sounds of the waterfall rushing over the stable rocks:

Thine earthly rainbows stretched across the sweep  
Of the ethereal waterfall, whose veil  
Robes some unsculptured image; the strange sleep  
Which when the voices of the desert fail  
Wraps all in its own deep eternity; — (25-29)

A chiasmic pair of tropes, ‘the earthly rainbows’ (25) and ‘ethereal waterfall’ (26) work harmoniously in the lines. The waterfall is a ‘veil’ (26), which has the power to ornament the mountain rock as ‘some unsculptured image’ (27). Such a covering image slides into the image of ‘the strange sleep’ (27), which ‘[w]raps all in its own deep eternity’ (29). At this moment, the noise of the wilderness fades away, as the enchanting power of this slumber mediates between the ‘earthly’ and ‘ethereal.’ The rainbows bridge these two regions, earth and sky—tangible and intangible—implying the unity of the landscape and mind. By employing such natural imagery, Shelley ensures that this internalised image of the rainbows is infused with the psychological processes of the human mind:

Thy caverns echoing to the Arve’s commotion,

A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;  
Thou art pervaded with such ceaseless motion,  
Thou art the path of that unresting sound— (30-33)

The torrential streams of the Arve make an untameable ‘commotion’ (30) and its ‘unresting sound’ (31) is like the ‘ceaseless motion’ (32). To reinforce this effect of the smooth motion and its rhythm, the rhyme of ‘commotion’ and ‘motion’ forges a close and strong connection between them. In other words, the human mind or emotion represented as ‘caverns’ resonates with the ‘Arve’s commotion.’ This relation of ‘caverns’ to the human mind is also explained by Version B of ‘Mont Blanc,’ which describes the ‘secret caves’ (4) as ‘[t]he source of human thought’ (5).

The metaphor of the ‘cavern’ (30) for the mind, in a section entitled ‘Difficulty of Analysing the Human Mind’ from Shelley’s *A Treatise on Morals*, offers a variation on the image of secret springs as human thought in ‘Mont Blanc,’ which are intriguingly both ‘dark’ and ‘glittering’:

But thought can with difficulty visit the intricate and winding chambers which it inhabits. It is like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outwards—like one in dread who speeds through the recesses of some haunted pile and dares not look behind. The caverns of mind are obscure and shadowy; or pervaded with lustre, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals. If it were possible to be where we have been, vitally and indeed—if, at the moment of our presence there, we could define the results of our experience—if the passage from sensation to reflection—from a state of passive perception to voluntary contemplation were not so dizzying and so tumultuous, this attempt would be less difficult. (SP 186)<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> As I. J. Kapstein and Judith Chernaik observe, from the outset of the poem the metaphor of

It is tempting to read this passage in terms of Plato's metaphor of the cavern, but it is equally suggestive in terms of sensibility and psychology, especially the psychological interplay of 'passive perception' and 'voluntary contemplation.' The flow of emotion is spontaneous but not voluntary, as it violently carries the mind away from a field of empirical analysis to dizziness and tumult. This structure of emotion or the mind corresponds to the 'motion' of 'commotion' in the vale, which in itself is a metaphor of emotion in the process of *poiesis*.

As Shelley writes in the letter to Peacock, the poet sees poetry in the sublime landscape and calls Mont Blanc a 'creator' as well as 'poet': 'All was as much our own as if we had been the creators of such impressions in the minds of others, as now occupied our own.—Nature was the poet whose harmony held our spirits more breathless than that of the divinest' (*Letter* 1:497). Mont Blanc or Nature is, for the poet-speaker, equal to a poet who creates the sublime world by her or his own 'unresting sounds' and 'ceaseless motion.' In Shelley's *A Refutation of Deism*, motion is an important attribute of the Deity. Theosophus states this point in the following manner: 'If there is motion in the Universe, there is a God. The power of beginning motion is no less an attribute of mind than sensation or thought. Wherever motion exists it is evident that mind has operated. The phenomena of the Universe indicate the agency of powers which cannot belong to inert matter' (*PWPBS* 1: 112).<sup>52</sup> In the case

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the current of 'human thought' bears affinities with this passage. I. J. Kapstein, 'The Meaning of Shelley's "Mont Blanc,"' *PMLA* 62 .4 (1947): 1048; and Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* 59n.

<sup>52</sup> With reference to Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), Eusebes replies to Theosophus's statement in the following manner: 'To devise the word God, that you may

of 'Mont Blanc,' the initial motion of the spring water is identical with what Theosophus calls the 'power of beginning motion.'

In *A Treatise on Morals*, Shelley considers physical and emotional 'motion' in terms of perception. Shelley, following Spinoza's philosophy, says: 'it is said that mind produces motion and it might as well have been said that motion produces mind' (*SP* 184).<sup>53</sup> Shelley articulates this correlation of the perceiver and percept in an earlier passage:

We see trees, houses, fields, living beings in our own shape, and in shapes more or less analogous to our own. These are perpetually changing the mode of their existence relatively to us. To express the varieties of these modes, we say, *we move, they move*; and as this motion is continual, though not uniform, we express our conception of the diversities of its course by, *it has been, it is, it shall be*. These diversities are events or objects and are essential, considered relatively to human identity, for the existence of the human mind. For if the inequalities produced by what has been termed the operations of the external universe were levelled by the perception of our being uniting and filling up their interstices, motion, and mensuration, and time, and space; the elements of the human mind being thus abstracted, sensation and imagination cease. Mind cannot be considered pure. (*SP* 184)<sup>54</sup>

As Shelley says, the 'varieties' and 'diversities' of objects are indispensable for the

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express a certain portion of the universal system, can answer no good purpose in philosophy: In the language of reason, the words God and Universe are synonymous' (*PWPBS* 1: 122).

<sup>53</sup> See David Lee Clark's note (*SP* 184n12). There is the same passage in the essay *On Life* (*Norton Critical Edition* 2002), 509. According to Christoph Bode, this passage in *On Life* reveals that Shelley's idealism is based on a 'full-grown materialism' and 'Shelley is an ontological materialist and an epistemological idealist at the same time' ('A Kantian Sublime in Shelley' 346-47).

<sup>54</sup> Shelley addresses a similar topic in *A Refutation of Deism*: 'Mind cannot create, it can only perceive. Mind is the recipient of impressions made on the organs of sense, and without the action of external objects we should not only be deprived of all knowledge of the existence of mind, but totally incapable of the knowledge of any thing' (*PWPBS* 1: 122).



human mind. In doing so, the very idea of ‘motion’ causes this differentiation. On the one hand, motion as differentiation produces temporality and spatiality, and on the other, if the mind is purely abstracted, then this motion (or ‘the operation of the external universe’) ceases along with ‘sensation’ and ‘imagination.’ In this sense, for Shelley, ‘perception,’ ‘sensation’ and ‘imagination’ are subject to the interplay of the ‘motion’ between the subject’s mind and things as objects. Interestingly, in ‘Mont Blanc,’ the motion of the water is depicted in a way that intermingles the secret spring with the human mind. The human mind, according to Shelley, produces sensory impression and imagination, but this operation is interdependent so that the percept moves the perceiver and, conversely, the perceiver moves the percept.

### **Mont Blanc and *Tabula Rasa*: The Process of *Poiesis***

It is also important to pay attention to the fact that both *A Treatise on Morals* and ‘Mont Blanc’ clearly evoke John Locke’s accounts of the psychological process of the recognition of sounds as occurring within the human mind.<sup>55</sup> According to Mary Shelley’s *Journal*, at about the time he was composing ‘Mont Blanc,’ Shelley was intensively reading Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) from the 15th to 23rd of November, 1816.<sup>56</sup> Yet, Shelley’s knowledge of Locke’s *Essay*

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<sup>55</sup> For the relation of Lockean psychology to the psychological motion depicted in the opening lines of Shelley’s ‘Mont Blanc’ in terms of this splendour in the mind, see, Kapstein, 1047-48; and Earl R. Wasserman, *The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of Neoclassic and Romantic Poems* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959) 197-205.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (1987; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) 146-47 (hereafter this correction is abbreviated as *MSJ*).

*Concerning Human Understanding* predates this period. On 11th of June in 1811, Shelley writes to Elizabeth Hitchener and comments on Locke's theory of feeling and external stimuli from his perspective of associationism:

Locke *proves* that there are no innate ideas, that in consequence there can be no innate speculative or practical principles, thus overturning all appeals of *feeling* in favor of Deity, since that feeling must be referable to some origin; there must have been a time when it did not exist, in consequence a time when it began to exist, since all ideas are derived from the senses this feeling must have originated from some sensual excitation, consequently the possessor of it may be aware of the time, of the circumstances attending its commencement. Locke *proves* this, by induction too clear to admit of *rational* objection [...]. (LPBS 1: 99-100)

In another letter, Shelley articulates the same idea in a different manner:

the none[-]existence of innate ideas is proved by Locke—he challenges any one to find an idea which *is* innate—this is conclusive—if no ideas are innate, then all ideas must take their origin subsequent to the transfusion of the soul—in consequence of this indisputable truth, intellect varie{s} but in the impressions with which casualty or intention has marked it.

(LPBS 1: 136)

Shelley insists on the belief that 'no ideas are innate' and since 'all ideas are derived from the senses this feeling must have originated from some sensual excitation,' which is why Shelley insists that '[m]ind cannot be considered pure'—in his discussion of the interplay between 'motion' and 'emotion' in *A Treatise on Morals*. From a psychological point of view, Mont Blanc—when infused with the *motion* of waters and *emotion* of the human mind—becomes an allegory for the operation of (poetic) language. Mont Blanc is a blank surface of enormous rock or, like Locke's *tabula rasa*,

a white canvas of ‘some unsculptured image’ (37).

In ‘Mont Blanc,’ poetic language resonates with the torrent from the waterfalls of Mont Blanc as ‘the path of that unresting sound’ (33) is uncontrollably and arbitrarily produced from ‘the source of human thought.’<sup>57</sup> In other words, the sound of the water alludes to the articulation of (poetic) language, since the pairing of *motion* and *emotion* in Shelley’s poem is, in its very essence, inextricable from the mass of sounds that constitute poetry. As Locke puts it:

Sounds also, besides the distinct cries of Birds and Beasts, are modified by diversity of Notes of different length put together, which make that complex *Idea* call’d a *Tune*, which a Musician may have in his mind, when he hears or makes no Sound at all, by reflecting on the *Ideas* of those Sounds, so put together silently in his own Fancy.<sup>58</sup>

Locke articulates how a variety of natural sounds including ‘cries of Birds and Beasts’ evoke ‘*Ideas*’ in the human mind. Music is, among other things, a sophisticated art of expressing an abstract ‘complex *Idea*,’ because a ‘Musician’ creates what he imagines

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<sup>57</sup> With regard to the arbitrary aspect of language, Shelley argues in *A Treatise on Morals* that a ‘specific difference between every thought of the mind is indeed a necessary consequence of that law by which it perceives diversity and number; but a generic or essential difference is wholly arbitrary’ (SP 183). This argument is later to be further refined in *A Defence of Poetry*: ‘For language is arbitrarily produced by the Imagination and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments and conditions of art have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression’ (SPP 513). Keach claims that Shelley recognises the arbitrariness of language. William Keach, ‘Romanticism and Language,’ *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010) 123-24. See also William Keach, *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004) 39-40. Shelley addresses the same inter-relation of Saussurean terms in ‘On Life.’ For more details about Shelley as a predecessor of Saussure, see Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘Language and Form,’ *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, Morton, 150; and Stuart Peterfreund, *Shelley Among Others: The Play of the Intertext and the Idea of Language* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002) 116-17.

<sup>58</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (1975: Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979) 224. See also Locke’s explanation of motion and sound in *An Essay on Human Understanding* (Book II Chapter xviii Section 2-3).

in the mind, with the aid of 'Fancy,' in the form of 'a Tune' comprised of complex 'Notes.' Yet, this passage on music also applies to the poet, another musician whose language is itself made from a 'diversity of Notes' just like music. In a similar vein, Shelley signifies how important these sound elements are to the process of *poiesis*:

Sounds as well as thoughts have relation both between each other and towards that which they represent, and a perception of the order of those relations, has always been found connected with a perception of the order of the relations of thoughts. Hence the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its influence, than the words themselves without reference to that peculiar order. (*SPP* 514)

If the poet harmonises 'thoughts' (*emotion*) with 'perception' (*motion*) by using 'recurrence of sound,' Shelley's 'Mont Blanc' is a manifestation of the interplay between *motion* and *emotion* by means of his poetic language which opens a 'portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things' (*SPP* 532).

This haunting imagery of the cave plays a crucial part in the third stanza of 'Mont Blanc.' 'Mont Blanc,' further investigates this idea of *poiesis* and imagination, when the struggling speaker tries to tame the uncontrollable aspects of experience and poetic language operating in his mind:

Dizzy Ravine! And when I gaze on thee  
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange  
To muse on my own separate phantasy,  
My own, my human mind, which passively

Now renders and receives fast influencings,  
 Holding an unremitting interchange  
 With the clear universe of things around;  
 One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings  
 Now float above thy darkness, and now rest  
 Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,  
 In the still cave of the witch Poesy,  
 Seeking among the shadows that pass by,  
 Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,  
 Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast  
 From which they fled recalls them, thou art there! (34-48)

The viewer-poet seeking for a hidden transcendental significance within the ravine, at last recognises that the 'sublime' (35) of the 'Dizzy Ravine' (34) is not outside himself, but contained within his own 'human mind' (37), which holds 'an unremitting interchange / With the clear universe of things around' (39-40). The mind that 'passively' (37) perceives 'the clear universe of things around' (40), simultaneously, grows to become 'the still cave of the witch Poesy' (44), which shapes 'wild thoughts' (48) into a style of poetry.<sup>59</sup> This passage is a poetic version of the psychological process of perception that Shelley discusses in *A Treatise on Morals*. These allegorical images imply that the speaker's poetic mind can revive dead language represented as the 'faint image' (47) of those 'Ghosts' (46) or 'phantom' (47).

In the next stanza, by passing through the 'cave' of 'Poesy' or the poetic mind,

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<sup>59</sup> The imagery of a cave is abundant in Shelley's poetry. The motif of a mysterious or prophetic woman in the cave is also found in other poems, such as 'The Witch of Atlas' (1820; 185-89), *Epipsychidion* (290-91). Keach relates *Laon and Cythna* (VII xxxi 3100-03) to Mary Wollstonecraft's 'The Cave of Fancy' (1787), by reading Cythna's narrative as a transfiguration of 'The Cave of Fancy' (*Arbitrary Power* 100-12).

these 'faint image[s]' like '[g]hosts' are metamorphosed into 'gleams of a remoter world' (49) which 'visit the soul in sleep' (50). The more important point here is that 'death is slumber' (50) as if 'some unknown omnipotence unfurled / The veil of life and death' (53-54).<sup>60</sup> This imaginary world is imbued with more various 'shapes' or images than waking life (52-3). In looking up towards the mountain, the speaker asks:

or do I lie  
In dream, and does the mightier world of sleep  
Spread far around and inaccessibly  
Its circles? For the very spirit fails,  
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep  
That vanishes among the viewless gales! (54-59)

Now the image of the waterfall-veil in the second stanza reappears as the 'veil of life and death' (54). These lines raise a poetic and philosophical question as to how the mountain inspires the imagination. The poet's imagination or 'the still cave of the witch Poesy' inspired by Mont Blanc carries the speaker's 'spirit' (57) away into somewhere located on the border of the real and 'dream' (55) represented by 'the mightier world of sleep' (55).<sup>61</sup> 'Driven like a homeless cloud' (58), the speaker's 'spirit' is swallowed into the sublime and 'viewless gales' (59) of the mountain.

### **The Active Voice and the 'Perpetual Stream' of Sounds**

The poet-speaker keeps ascending the crevassed snowfield surrounded with dangerous

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<sup>60</sup> For an exposition of the word 'unfurled' in 'Mont Blanc,' see E. B. Murray, 'Mont Blanc's Unfurled Veil,' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 18 (1969): 39-48.

<sup>61</sup> See Mary's note to Shelley's fragment entitled 'Catalogue of the Phenomena of Dreams as Connecting Sleeping and Waking' (SP 194n1).

and ‘sublime’ objects. The landscape is now depicted with bleak and even sinister imagery. The severe environment of the cold mountain foreshadows death, through Shelley’s gloomy ‘hunter’s bone’ (68) and ‘[g]hostly, and scarred, and riven’ (71). As the poet-speaker searches through this world of death, the mountain is transformed into something beyond reality, a more sublime and unearthly world of ice and stillness. The poet-speaker addresses Mont Blanc:

—Is this the scene  
Where the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young  
Ruin? Were these their toys? or did a sea  
Of fire, envelope once this silent snow?  
None can reply—all seems eternal now.  
The wilderness has a mysterious tongue  
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,  
So solemn, so serene, that man may be  
But for such faith with nature reconciled;  
Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal  
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood  
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good  
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel. (71-83)

The mountain, associated with ‘the old Earthquake-daemon’ (72), is depicted as a sublime ‘Ruin’ (73), which seems to transcend time, or rather temporality as ‘all seems eternal now’ (75) in this lonely and frozen ‘wilderness’ (76).<sup>62</sup> Yet the speaker

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<sup>62</sup> These lines also evokes eighteenth-century geological discourses after Thomas Burnet’s *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (Latin 1681; English 1684-90), such as Comte de Buffon’s ‘La Théorie de la terre’ (1749), vol. 1 of his *Historie naturelle*, James Hutton’s *A Theory of the Earth* (1785), Erasmus Darwin’s *The Temple of Nature* (1803), and others. Shelley mentions Buffon’s theory in a letter to Peacock on 22 July 1816 (1: 499). For readings of ‘Mont Blanc’ from the geological perspectives of the time, see G. M. Matthews, ‘A Volcano’s Voice in Shelley,’ *ELH* 24.3 (1957): 191-228; Nigel Leask, ‘Mont Blanc’s Mysterious Voice: Shelley and Huttonian Earth Science,’ *The Third Culture: Literature and Science*, ed. Elinor S. Shaffer

experiences not merely fear and trembling, but, simultaneously, also finds pleasure and hope.

It is also noteworthy that in this passage the sense of hearing is described more often than the sense of sight. Employing several tropes related to acoustic elements, the speaker dares to address and communicate with the mountain through its 'mysterious tongue' (76). In this tongue the mountain speaks with its exclusive 'voice' (80), which will be heard only by 'the wise, and great, and good' (83). Here again, as in the sixth stanza of the 'Hymn,' the 'voice' is also depicted as a prelude to an epiphany and with the ability to 'repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe' (80-1). This ostensibly eternal moment is, in fact, felt only through the speaker's sensibility and subjectivity, as the 'voice' from the 'mysterious tongue' of the wild mountain is intended to be decoded by the speaker in the moment of sublime experience. Only the 'wise, great and good' (82) can 'interpret' (83) the enigmatic 'voice' of this 'great Mountain' (80), and by doing so, both make its power 'felt' and 'deeply feel' its presence (83). Intriguingly, this subtle difference between the passive and active *voice* of 'felt' and 'feel' in grammatical terms closely relates to the 'voice' from the 'Mountain.' On one hand, the 'human mind,' the viewer-poet says, 'passively / Now renders and receives fast influencings' (37-38) from the Mountain's 'voice.' From the point of view of the 'Mountain' as object, its 'voice' is 'being felt' by those persons and this would be a passive experience. On the other hand,

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(Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998)182-203; Bewell, 221-27; Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004) esp. 54-93; and Nahoko Alvey Miyamoto, *'Strange Truths in Undiscovered Lands': Shelley's Poetic Development and Romantic Geology* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2009) esp. 83-108.



this very mind simultaneously ‘deeply feel[s]’ the ‘Power’ to create his own verse through his own voice. With this active voice, the poet can translate or assimilate the ‘mysterious tongue’ into his own poetry. Such a verbal interplay between the subject (the perceiver) and the object (the percept) exactly embodies the relationship between *emotion* and *motion* described earlier in Shelley’s *A Treatise on Morals* (SP 184).

In the fourth stanza, too, Shelley as poet goes on to depict *poiesis* through auditory and kinetic imagery. The speaker explores the opposition between stillness and motion or between peace and destructive powers in Chamonix, which also reflect the characteristic of *poiesis* in itself. The speaker enumerates natural elements in the phenomenal world including:

The fields, the lakes, the forests, and the streams,  
Ocean, and all the living things that dwell  
Within the daedal earth; lightning, and rain,  
Earthquake, and fiery flood, and hurricane,  
The torpor of the year when feeble dreams  
Visit the hidden buds, or dreamless sleep  
Holds every future leaf and flower;—the bound  
With which from that detested trance they leap;  
The works and ways of man, their death and birth,  
And that of him and all that his may be;  
All things that move and breathe with toil and sound  
Are born and die; revolve, subside and swell. (84-95).

In this passage, both serene and fierce elements coexist within the one single object, ‘the daedal earth’ (86), which implies that for the poet’s eyes, the ‘earth’ or nature is as complicated and intricate as Dædalus’s works. Ensuing upon the dynamic or even

tempestuous impressions of the earth (86-87), two forms of sleep are described—one is a hibernating sleep in a state of ‘torpor’ (88) and the other is death as ‘slumber’ (50). More precisely, as the king says in *Queen Mab*: ‘Awful death, / I wish, yet fear to clasp thee!—not one moment / Of dreamless sleep!’ (III 65-67). On the one hand, hibernating sleep for ‘the hidden buds’ (89) entails a ‘feeble dream’ (88), a hope for spring, namely the future, and on the other, death is, for plants, ‘dreamless sleep’ (89) before being ‘born’ (94) again. In this cycle of ‘death and birth’ (93), ‘[a]ll things [...] revolve, subside and swell’ (94-95). The ‘toil and sound’ (94) of all lives on earth resonate with the ‘toil’ of *poiesis* and its ‘sound.’

Mont Blanc is a symbolic source of all earthly creatures as well as *poiesis*. The essential cause which operates this process of life and death is the ‘Power [which] dwells apart in its tranquillity, / Remote, serene, and inaccessible’ (96-7). Poetic harmony is fading due to the representation of the mountain’s violent power from the latter part of the fourth stanza onwards, focusing on a horizontal dynamic of its glaciers and vertical precipices:

And *this*, the naked countenance of earth,  
 On which I gaze, even these primeval mountains  
 Teach the adverting mind. The glaciers creep  
 Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains,  
 Slow rolling on; there, many a precipice,  
 Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power  
 Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,  
 A city of death, distinct with many a tower  
 And wall impregnable of beaming ice.

Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin  
Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky  
Rolls its perpetual stream [...]. (98-109)<sup>63</sup>

Through the poetic imagination, the precipices transform to ‘dome, pyramid, and pinnacle’ (104), which comprise a ‘city of death’ (105) decorated with towers and walls of ice. Mont Blanc is represented as static architecture, but with no life, which implies that the ‘Power’ (16), which resides in Mont Blanc is both a symbol of organic unity in nature and a place of numerous deaths. Therefore, there is no motion, no sound. However, the phrase a ‘flood of ruin’ (107) is revealing because ‘flood’ connotes a dynamic mode, whilst ‘ruin’ implies a static mode. Two opposite dynamics are at work in this passage. This image of the ‘flood of ruin,’ echoing the metaphorical depiction of the ‘glaciers [that] creep / Like snakes that watch their prey, from their far fountains, / Slow rolling on’ (100-02), implies a real ‘perpetual stream’ (109) of water as well as of time that is associated with the image of Mont Blanc as the ruins or a ‘city of death.’

These lines about the landscape make Mont Blanc a sublime object to stimulate the onlooker’s imagination for (poetic) creation. In the world of ‘Mont Blanc,’ this spring in the human mind grows and finally bursts into the uncontrollable and ‘rushing torrents’ restless gleam’ (121) from ‘secret chasms’ (122)—also recalling ‘secret springs / The source of human thought’ at the beginning of the poem—to merge with the Rhône like the ‘ALPH’ (3) in ‘Kubla Khan’(1816).<sup>64</sup> This ‘one majestic River’

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<sup>63</sup> Shelley also describes a ‘majesty of outline’ with ‘an awful grace’ of Mont Blanc, including ‘the glacier’ and ‘[c]onical & pyramidal crystallizations,’ in a letter to Peacock (*LPBS* 1: 497-98).

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Kubla Khan,’ *Poetical Works I* 16:512-14.

(123), then, for ever / Rolls its loud waters to the ocean waves, / Breathes its swift vapours to the circling air' (125) as another form of 'perpetual stream.'

In the last stanza of 'Mont Blanc,' the poet and the mountain are mediated through two forms of *poiesis* or 'Power': the poet's creation and Nature's creation. The mountain's perpetual act of *poiesis* is depicted through the lines in which life is regenerated from death: 'the power is there, / The still and solemn power of many sights, / And many sounds, and much of life and death' (127-29). Here Shelley's various kinds of kinetic imagery result in silence:

—Winds contend

Silently there, and heap the snow with breath  
Rapid and strong, but silently! Its home  
The voiceless lightning in these solitudes  
Keep innocently, and like vapour broods  
Over the snow. The secret strength of things  
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome  
Of heaven is as a law, inhabits thee! (134-41)

The 'solitudes' (137) of the Mountain are effectively expressed by the repetition of the word 'silently' (135, 136). The phrase 'voiceless lightning' (137) also reinforces this silent effect. This silence, like the case of the dreaming buds, provides a tension between the quietude and silence of winter and 'many sights, / And many sounds' brought by spring, as well as by the human mind's 'secret springs,' which are identified with '[t]he secret strength of things'(139).

A manifestation of this poetic voice, which interweaves the human mind and Mont Blanc as an aesthetic object, is marked by Shelley's last address to the mountain:

And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,  
If to the human mind's imaginings  
Silence and solitude were vacancy? (142-4)

Shelley's final three lines both capture a sublime moment and affirm the impossibility of *poiesis* without sense perception. Without the sound and motion of natural objects that stimulate his mind, without sensing the 'power' in those objects, the poetic mind remains vacant, as Shelley says 'motion produces mind' and *vice versa*. In the same way, poetic minds cannot generate imagination by themselves. Shelley's two sister lyrics, 'Hymn to the Intellectual Beauty' (an invisible object) and 'Mont Blanc' (a visible object) are hymns praising how the poet's imagination depends on an interplay between the subject and object, the visible and invisible, or silence and sounds, rather than the agency of some transcendental and super-sensible entity.

Shelley is, however, not a passive nihilist, but rather an active nihilist, like Nietzsche, in the sense that he believes in the creative power of the imagination.<sup>65</sup> This is not naïve admiration for the imagination. These companion lyrics are not simply about the ineffable nature of all aesthetic and sublime experiences, but also about the creative imagination derived from the very knowledge of the unpredictable, uncontrollable, uncertainty of poetic language, and the experience that it seeks to circumscribe in the moment of inspiration.

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<sup>65</sup> As Sandy notes, the final three lines of 'Mont Blanc' show that like 'Nietzsche's Dionysian artist,' who always affirms 'the mutable world' through the power of art, 'Shelley's self-doubt [...] is transformed into a positive assertion of his creative capacities' (*Poetics of Self* 73). Shelley left a Greek phrase in the Hotel d'Angleterre at Chamouni, which means 'democrat, great lover of mankind, and atheist.' See Gavin de Beer, 'An Atheist in the Alps,' *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 9 (1958): 8.



## Chapter IV

### **The Fragmentary and Violence: ‘The Coliseum’ and ‘On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vince, in the Florentine Gallery’**

The period which intervened between the birth of Pericles and the death of Aristotle is undoubtedly, whether considered in itself or with reference to the effects which it had produced upon the subsequent destinies of civilized man, the most memorable in the history of the world. What was the combination of moral and political circumstances which produced so unparalleled a progress during that period in literature and the arts—why that progress, so rapid and so sustained, so soon received a check, and became retrograde—are problems left with the wonder and conjecture of posterity. The Wrecks and fragments of those subtle and profound minds, like the ruins of a fine statue, obscurely suggest to us the grandeur and perfection of the whole. Their very language—a type of the understandings of which it was the creation and the image—in variety, in simplicity, in flexibility, and in copiousness, excels every other language of the western world.

—Shelley ‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’—

*The monstrous figures called Arabesques,—however in some of them is to be found a mixture of a truer and simpler taste—, which are found in the ruined palaces of the Roman Emperors, bear, nevertheless, the same relation to the brutal profligacy and killing luxury which required them, as the majestic figures of Castor and Pollux, and the simple beauty of the sculptures of the frieze of the Parthenon, bear to the more beautiful and simple manners of the Greeks of that period. With a liberal interpretation, a similar analogy might be extended into literary composition.*

—Shelley’s Note on Plato’s *The Republic*—

## 1. 'Your Eye Has a Vision More Serene than Mine': The Forms of Ruin and Sympathetic Circulation in 'The Coliseum' as a Prose Poem

### The Ruins and Sentiment

This chapter explores ideas of incompleteness and Shelley's poetics of fragmentation in two ekphrastic texts, 'The Coliseum' and 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, in the Florentine Gallery.' With regard to Shelley's notion of ruins, Thomas McFarland has pointed out the significance of the '*sentiment des ruines*,' the sentiment of ruins, in relation to *Alastor* (108-26) and 'Ozymandias': 'In Shelley's vision, the Romantic quest leads with "wandering step" to "The awful ruins of the days of old," where [...] there flashes "meaning" on the wanderer's mind.'<sup>1</sup> Despite the presence of the 'sentiment of ruins' in every era, this concept, McFarland says, takes a new direction in the Romantic era, as illustrated by Shelley's poems on ruins (14-5). Exactly the same sentiment of ruins as discussed by McFarland is also found in Shelley's prose fragment, 'The Coliseum.'<sup>2</sup> A close reading of 'The Coliseum' will expose a tension between the exterior and interior of the Coliseum. The tension between interior and exterior is expressed through this ruin's peaceful semblance recuperated by nature and the remains of an ancient civilisation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), 14. See also Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* 37-48.

<sup>2</sup> Quotations from 'The Coliseum' are taken from the following edition. Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'The Colosseum,' *SP*, 224-28. Although the editor David Lee Clark deliberately adopts the Latin form, *Colosseum*, I retain Shelley's (apparently) original word, 'Coliseum.'

<sup>3</sup> With regard to this fusion of nature and architecture, Elizabeth Wanning Harries points out that '[l]ike his contemporaries, Gilpin [in *Lake Tower* (1772)] insists that a convincing ruin depends on the interplay of the work of man and the timely work of nature. The artificial ruin becomes the locus of their longing to see architecture and nature, not as opposed, but as united.'



In 'The Coliseum,' Shelley's ekphrastic description of the ruined Roman amphitheatre plays an important part in the communication between the blind and unnamed father and his daughter, Helen.<sup>4</sup> The father, incapable of seeing the ruins of the Coliseum, is helped by Helen to recreate the ruins imaginatively in his inner vision. The description of the ruins through their collaboration is based on Shelley's own aesthetic experience in Rome. In his letter to Thomas Love Peacock (17 or 18 December 1818), Shelley emphasises its beautiful and sublime coalescence of nature and artefact:

It is of enormous height & circuit & the arches built of massy stones are piled on one another, & just into the blue air shattered into the forms of overhanging rocks. It has been changed by time into the image of an amphitheatre of rocky hills overgrown by the wild-olive the myrtle & the fig tree, & threaded by little paths which wind among its ruined stairs & immeasurable galleries [...]. But a small part of the exterior circumference remains, it is exquisitely light & beautiful, & the effect of the perfection of its architecture adorned with range of Corinthian pilasters supporting a bold cornice, is such as to diminish the effect of its greatness. The interior is all ruin. I can scarcely believe that when encrusted with Dorian marble & ornamented by columns of Egyptian granite its effect could have been so sublime & so impressive as in its present state. (*LPBS* 2: 58-59)

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Harries goes on to say that for Gilpin and his contemporary admirers of ruins, those artificial ruins 'might symbolically repair the damage that human history has done, return us to a mythical state in which art and nature are again allied.' Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1994) 68-69. Harries also discusses other instances of eighteenth-century taste for ruins such as Diderot's 'Poetics of ruins' (91). See also Anne Janowitz, *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (London: Blackwell, 1990) 54-91.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Colbert observes that in 'their intergenerational and interpersonal love, the father-daughter relationship models [Shelley's] aesthetic ideals of visual and visionary communion.' Benjamin Colbert, *Shelley's Eye: Travel Writing and Aesthetic Vision* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 183.

Shelley depicts how exquisitely Nature adds a different effect of beauty to the gigantic architecture built by humanity, harmonising its interior and exterior. Shelley's language transforms this descriptive passage in 'The Coliseum' into a prose-poem. In fact, the blind father's eye has an inward vision which transfigures the ruin of the ancient Roman architecture into a cyclical symbol of organic unity of nature and architecture: 'A nursling of man's art, abandoned by his care, and transformed by the enchantment of Nature into a likeness of her own creations, and destined to partake their immortality!' (SP226).<sup>5</sup> By dint of the blind father's imaginative power, inspired by Helen's descriptive sight, the ruins of the Coliseum are metamorphosed from the 'shattered arches' and 'isolated pinnacles of the ruin' into the natural sublimity of 'pine forests and precipices in the Alps of Savoy.'<sup>6</sup>

Yet this peaceful and harmonious monument of Roman civilisation also arouses some poignant and haunting memories. This fragment of prose-fiction, as noted by Timothy Clark and Kevin Binfield, exhibits a (Romantic) dichotomy between the expanding aspiration towards moral perfection and the moral limitations associated with the Coliseum's significance for Roman imperialism.<sup>7</sup> This sentiment is shared by

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<sup>5</sup> There is an echo of this idea in a fragmentary poem, 'Rome Has Fallen, Ye See It Lying,' (1819): 'Rome has fallen, ye see it lying / Heaped in undistinguished ruin; / Nature is alone undying.' Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Rome Has Fallen, Ye See It Lying,' *POS*, 2:453.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 'Mont Blanc' 102-9.

<sup>7</sup> See Timothy Clark 'Shelley after Deconstruction,' Clark and Hogle, 102-3; Kevin Binfield, "'May They Be Divided Never': Ethics, History, and the Rhetorical Imagination in Shelley's 'The Coliseum,'" *Keats-Shelley Journal* 46 (1997): 140-41; and Hugh Roberts discusses a similar 'ironic tension' in 'The Coliseum': 'the individual is simultaneously aware of the fragmenting consequences of our fallen state ("the misfortune of the condition of life") and of an impulse toward the Absolute.' Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997) 111.

Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), where the narrator regards the Coliseum as both a positive and negative heritage of the Roman Empire (IV 1243-305).<sup>8</sup> Yet Shelley's historical interpretation of the Coliseum is slightly different from Byron's in ways that extend beyond Greco-Roman civilisation. This notion, for Shelley, implicitly inscribed into the text, emerges through the interplay between Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian civilisation residing within the text of 'The Coliseum.'

### **Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Elements and Blindness to Violence**

The germ of the interrelations between Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Roman civilisations is already sown in the dialogue that takes place in 'The Coliseum,' when the stranger, as a representative of Greco-Roman civilisation, boasts about the ruined Coliseum as an object of monumental art: 'alone the spectacle of these mighty ruins is more delightful than the mockeries of a superstition which destroyed' Greco-Roman myths and arts (*SP* 225). What the stranger implies by the phrase 'the mockeries of a superstition' is clearly Christianity.<sup>9</sup> The stranger embodies the Greco-Roman view of

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<sup>8</sup> George Gordon Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, The Complete Poetical Works*, 2:166-67. For Byron's ambivalent attitudes towards the Coliseum in relation to his historical consciousness, see Mark Sandy, "'The Colossal Fabric's Form': Remodelling Memory, History, and Forgetting in Byron's Poetic Recollections of Ruins,' *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 51 (2008), para. 12-14, March 2011 <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ravon/2008/v/n51/019258ar.html>>. See also Mark Sandy, "'Ruinous Perfection': Reading Authors and Writing Readers in Romantic Fragments,' Rawes, 60-63.

<sup>9</sup> This sense of blame is possibly a sign that Shelley was influenced by reading *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1766-1788) by Edward Gibbon, whom Shelley once appreciated and later regarded as 'a cold and impassioned spirit' in contrast to Rousseau (*LPBS* 1: 51, 1: 488). See Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman*

things through his intellectual intensity and appearance, which reminds the viewer of the 'statues of Antinous' (SP 224). Such a character also resembles Shelley himself, by speaking 'Latin, and especially Greek' (SP 224), as well as having 'a knowledge of the northern languages of Europe' (SP 225). This stranger doubtless reflects Shelley's own Greek orientation.<sup>10</sup> At this time, Shelley was reading Johann Joachim Winckelmann, according to Mary Shelley's journals: 'Walk to the Coliseum—S. reads Winckelmann.'<sup>11</sup> Shelley's edition was a French translation (*Histoire de l'art chez les anciens, trad. de l'allemand, avec des notes historiques et critiques*) of Winckelmann's *A History of Ancient Art (Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* 1764) by Michel Huber and Hendrik Jansen (1766), which the poet read from 24th December 1818 through to March of 1819 (MSJ 246). In 'The Coliseum,' the significance that Winckelmann found in Greek culture is emphasised both in the figure of the stranger and in the depiction of the blind father's 'sublime and sweet' countenance as the 'Praxitelean image of the greatest of the poets' (SP 224). This is supplemented by the fact that he is accompanied by his daughter Helen, who recalls her namesake, Helen of Troy.<sup>12</sup>

Yet there is a question as to why the stranger admires Greek art in a site built by

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*Empire*, ed. David Womersley, vol. 2 (1994; London: Penguin, 1995) 71-97. See also Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* 108-10.

<sup>10</sup> See Colbert, *Shelley's Eye* 196.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (1987; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995) 253.

<sup>12</sup> For Winckelmann's impact on the Romantic poets in Britain, see David Ferris, *Silent Urns: Romanticism, Hellenism, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000) 16-51. Bruce Haley also mentions Shelley's reception of Winckelmann as well as of A. W. Schlegel and affinities between Winckelmann's writings and Shelley's 'A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love.' Bruce Haley, *Living Forms: Romantics and the Monumental Figure* (Albany: SUNY, 2003) 36-37. See also Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986) 32-33.

Romans. Regarding the relation of Greek art to ancient Roman culture, Shelley argues, in *A Defence of Poetry*, that ‘Horace, Catullus, Ovid, and generally the other great writers of the Virgilian age saw man and nature in the mirror of Greece’ (*SPP* 523). Shelley argues in the following passage that the real greatness of Roman culture is its social and religious order, rather than its artistic achievements:

The true Poetry of Rome lived in its institutions; for whatever of beautiful, true and majestic they contained could have sprung only from the faculty which creates the order in which they consist. The life of Camillus, the death of Regulus; the expectation of the Senators in their godlike state, of the victorious Gauls; the refusal of the Republic to make peace with Hannibal after the battle of Cannae, were not the consequences of a refined calculation of the probable personal advantage to result from such a rhythm and order in the shews of life, to those who were at once the poets and the actors of these immortal dramas.

(*SPP* 523)

The political order of Rome, according to Shelley, revealed that poetry required forms and regulations. That is to say, a good poem has a harmonious order and form. Shelley goes on to say:

The imagination beholding the beauty of this order, created it out of itself according to its own idea: the consequence was empire, and the reward ever-living fame. These things are not the less poetry, *quia carent vate sacro* [because they lack a sacred poet]. They are the episodes of the cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men. The Past, like an inspired rhapsodist, fills the theatre of everlasting generations with their harmony. (*SPP* 523)

In the last lines in this passage, Shelley figures all human history as a ‘cyclic poem’ and ‘the theatre of everlasting generations.’ In the case of ‘The Coliseum,’ through the blind

father's imagination, the circular shape of the ruined Coliseum, which is a historical monument of the political and religious order of the Roman empire, takes its place within the 'cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men.' In the cyclical movement of time and history, the poetry of the Roman order is, according to Shelley, altered into 'the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and the mythology and institutions of the Celtic conquerors of the Roman empire' (*SPP* 524). Shelley, in his letter to Peacock, writes negatively about the Emperor Constantine's establishment of Christianity as the state religion, describing Christianity as 'the destroyer of those arts which would have rendered so base a spoliation unnecessary' (*LPBS* 2: 86). These passages are possible sources of the stranger's criticism of what he regards Christian 'mockeries of a superstition which destroyed' the Coliseum as a piece of monumental Greco-Roman art and architecture.

This argument, however, enables us to notice a lacuna in 'The Coliseum,' which is represented by the silence about the Roman violence against Judaeo-Christian society. In 'The Coliseum,' the blind father refers to the ritual aspect of the amphitheatre: 'I should judge [...] that on sacred days the multitude wound up its craggy path to the spectacle or the sacrifice' (*SP* 226). Although, the original purpose of the Coliseum encompassed various kinds of entertainments, as Byron suggests in his image of the 'Roman Holiday' (4. 1266), Shelley here emphasises the misdeeds caused by religious superstition. Shelley comments on this in a note:

Superstitious rites, which in their mildest form, outrage reason, obscure the moral sense of mankind; schemes for wide-extended murder, and

devastation, and misrule and servitude; and lastly [...] a human being returning in the midst of festival and solemn joy, with thousands and thousands of his enslaved and desolated species chained behind his chariot, exhibiting, as titles to renown, the labor of ages, and the admired creations of genius, overthrown by the brutal force which was placed as a sword within his hand and, contemplation fearful and abhorred ! —he himself a being capable of the gentlest and best emotions, inspired with the persuasion that he has done a virtuous deed! We do not forget these things.... (SP 226n4)

This supplementary note to ‘The Coliseum’ uncovers the poet’s own concern about these scenes of violence committed by the Romans as a result of their own superstitious rituals. When imagining these memories of violence taking place in the Coliseum, it is not difficult to add the persecution of the early Christian minorities.<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the Coliseum has come to symbolise the violence and destruction of Rome, the city that had once gloried in the destruction of Jerusalem after the First Jewish-Roman War and the siege of Jerusalem (A.D. 66–73). About this violence Shelley writes in his *Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence* (1819) and comments on the Arch of Titus and the Coliseum:

On the inner compartment of the Arch of Titus is sculptured in deep relief, the desolation of a city. [...] The accompaniments of a town taken by assault, matrons and virgins and children and old men gathered into groups, and the rapine and licence of a barbarous and enraged soldiery, are imaged in a distance. [...] Beyond this obscure monument of Hebrew desolation is seen the tomb of the Destroyer’s family, now a mountain of

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<sup>13</sup> According to Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ‘Benedict the fourteenth,’ the Pope in the mid-eighteenth century (1740-1758), ‘consecrated a spot [the Coliseum] which persecution and fable had stained with the blood of so many Christian martyrs’ (3: 1080).

ruins.

The Flavian amphitheatre [the Coliseum] has become a habitation for owls and dragons. The power, of whose possession it was once the type, and of whose departure it is now the emblem, is become a dream and a memory. Rome is no more than Jerusalem. (*SP* 343)<sup>14</sup>

There is a verbal echo linking the casualties—‘matrons and virgins and children and old men gathered into groups’—in the sack of Jerusalem by the Roman Empire and Shelley’s depiction of Helen and her blind father in ‘The Coliseum.’ The Shelley-like stranger, aligned with the Greco-Roman civilisation, fails to notice the father’s physical blindness and regards the father and daughter as ‘blind in spirit,’ as if they had no taste to appreciate the beauty of the ruins (*SP* 228). The Shelley-like stranger claims that ‘superstition’ in Judaeo-Christian civilisation demolished the cultural heritage of Greco-Roman civilisation. Yet such a claim equally suggests that the stranger is mentally blind to (or has totally repressed) the oppression condoned by the superstitious Roman persecution of Judaeo-Christian minorities at that time. Led astray by superstition, the declined and ruined ‘Rome is,’ in her very essence, ‘no more than Jerusalem’ and the Coliseum is ‘a habitation for owls and dragons’ (*SP* 343).<sup>15</sup> This opposition is suggested in Christian civilisation’s abandonment and even devastation of the Greco-Roman culture as symbolised by the broken ruins of the Coliseum. In this

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<sup>14</sup> On Shelley’s comments on Michelangelo and other Greek sculptures, see Webb, ‘Shelley and the Religion of Joy’ 357-72.

<sup>15</sup> Shelley’s empathy to the oppressed people is also followed by his political poems such as ‘Ode to Liberty,’ ‘The Mask of Anarchy,’ ‘England in 1819’ and so on. Jennifer Wallace compares the influence of the French revolution in comte de Volney’s *The Ruins, or A Survey of the revolutions of Empire* (1795) with the ‘power of revolutionary change’ in ‘The Coliseum.’ Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) 159. See also Timothy Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism, 1700-1824* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982); and Duffy *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* 37-49.



respect, the presence of superstition in ‘The Coliseum’ illuminates the shared history of violence linking Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian civilisations. This circulation of violence is also associated with what Shelley identified as the ‘cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men.’

### **A Symbolic Circle of Love and Sympathy**

Yet, in ‘The Coliseum,’ Shelley shows a glimpse of hope that this dragons’ den can be restored to a more peaceful state. Through the imaginative ekphrasis of Helen and her blind father, the imagery related to Judaeo-Christian elements is effectively represented and visualised. For example, those pigeons dwelling in the Coliseum—they enjoy the ‘language of their happiness’ (*SP* 226) become doves of peace—pigeons are often identified with doves in the Bible (the word ‘*peristera*’ is used for both)—, figuratively suggesting the possibility that the two civilisations, despite their warring history, might be peacefully reconciled.<sup>16</sup> This foreshadowing of harmony is also underlined by the presence of ‘the wild olive and the myrtle’ as emblems of peace’ and ‘love,’ which are suggestive of the imagery of an ‘olive branch’ and ‘myrtle wreath’ respectively.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> A dictionary of the Bible in the late eighteenth century supports this point: ‘The several species of Doves are, the Wood-pigeon, the Tame pigeon, the Ring-dove or Turtle, the Picaipinima, and the St. Thomas’s pigeon. The three first species often occur in the Bible, under the names of the Pigeon and Turtle-dove.’ John Butterworth, *A New Concordance and Dictionary to the Holy Scriptures*, 3rd ed. (London, 1792) 173. Here are two examples: ‘she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering’ (*Leviticus* 12 6 [121-22]). Another example is: ‘And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons’ (*St Luke* 2 24[1011]). See James Hastings ed., *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. 1 (1906; Honolulu: UP of the Pacific, 2004) 65.

<sup>17</sup> See the definitions of ‘olive branch’ (1b) and ‘myrtle’ (3) in the *OED*.

wrecked arches become submarine caverns of the kind that were ‘the sea to overflow the earth, the mightiest monsters [such as Leviathan] of the deep would change into their spacious chambers’ (*SP* 226). In the end, the father figuratively transforms the ruins into a natural monumental landscape: ‘Changed into a mountain cloven with woody dells, which overhang its labyrinthine glade, and chattered into toppling precipices. Even the clouds, intercepted by its craggy summit, feed its eternal fountains with their rain’ (*SP* 226). This imaginative landscape gestures towards the biblical iconography of the dove of peace in Genesis, in particular the scene where Noah sends a dove to look for land (viii, 8-12).<sup>18</sup>

All the imagery of peace foretells the stranger’s friendship with Helen and her blind father, established by the stranger’s apology and regret for his rude behaviour to the old man and daughter. This ‘expiation of error’ is accepted by the daughter: “‘It gives me pain to see how much your mistake afflicts you [...]; if you can forget, doubt not that we forgive’” (*SP* 228). Helen’s words evoke Shelley’s discussion of what Jesus Christ calls ‘the practice of God’ in ‘On Christianity’: ‘Love your enemy, bless those who curse you, <do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you—>’ (*PWPBS* 1: 253). The stranger’s sin is washed away by his own tears just as ‘the sea to overflow the earth’ in the blind man’s vision. Helen and her father’s presence alongside their figurative (and often ekphrastic) descriptions of the Coliseum illuminates a Judaeo-Christian element inscribed into the Greco-Roman

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<sup>18</sup> The pairing of the blind father and his daughter, in this context, recalls the anecdote of the blind Milton dictating *Paradise Lost* to his daughters.

heritage. The recuperative image of peace thus resolves a tension between the Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian civilisations hidden in the ruins of the amphitheatre (or Hellenism and Hebraism in Matthew Arnold's terms).<sup>19</sup> The stranger's reconciliation with Helen and her father foreshadows how the tension between the two civilisations might be resolved.

In 'The Coliseum,' the image of the pigeons also serves another function. These flying pigeons inside the Coliseum prompt the blind father to locate a unifying impulse in the sympathetic and circulatory movement of earthly lives:

They [the pigeons] know not the sensations which this ruin excites within us. Yet it is pleasure to them to inhabit it; and the succession of its forms as they pass is connected with associations in their minds, sacred to them, as these to us. The internal nature of each being is surrounded by a circle, not to be surmounted by his fellows; and it is this repulsion which constitutes the misfortune of the condition of life. But there is a circle which comprehends, as well as one which mutually excludes, all things which feel. And, with respect to man, his public and his private happiness consists in diminishing the circumference which includes those resembling himself, until they become one with him, and he with them.

(SP 226-27)<sup>20</sup>

The blind father explains that the 'internal nature of each being [which] is surrounded

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<sup>19</sup> 'Hebraism and Hellenism,—between these two points of influence moves our world. At one time, it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other; and it ought to be, though it never is, evenly and happily balanced between them.' Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay on Political and Social Criticism, Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. Stefen Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 126-27. For Arnold's poetic evocation of the two civilisations, see also line 85-90, 139-44 of 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse' (1855). Matthew Arnold, 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse,' *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott, rev. Miriam Allott, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1979) 305-06, 308.

<sup>20</sup> One possible source of this passage is d'Holbach's discussion of mental repulsion ('self-gravitation' or 'self-love') as 'primitive sentiments common to all beings of human species' in *The System of Nature* (1:31 [1:43]).

by a circle' and yet this 'circle' often circumscribes an inner territory 'not to be surmounted by his fellows.' In this context, the stranger's reconciliation with the blind father and Helen prefigures the ideal state of human relationships by 'diminishing the circumference which includes those resembling himself, until they become one with him, and he with them.' Then, Shelley extends the analogy of the 'circle' to the 'internal nature of each being' on earth.

The blind father continues to develop this concept of sympathy and love, one which makes each being's circumscribed space coincide with the space of others. The power of love has much to do with human sensibility to the sublime and beautiful in nature as demonstrated by the blind father:

It is because we enter into the meditations, designs and destinies of something beyond ourselves, that the contemplation of the ruins of human power excites an elevating sense of awfulness and beauty. It is therefore that the ocean, the glacier, the cataract, the tempest, the volcano, have each a spirit which animates the extremities of our frame with tingling joy. It is therefore that the singing of birds, and the motion of leaves, the sensation of the odorous earth beneath, and the freshness of the living wind around, is sweet. And this is Love. This is the religion of eternity, whose votaries have been exiled from among the multitude of mankind. O Power! (*SP227*)

Here 'Love' as the essential core of human sensation is called the 'religion of eternity.'

This power of 'Love' and sympathy, supplemented and enhanced by the function of imagination, fills human sensation—their 'frame'—with 'tingling joy.' Like 'The First Epistle General of John,' the father holds to the belief that 'God is Love' (4.8). This is a

variation of Shelley's explanation about the Christian God discussed in 'On Christianity':

The mighty frame of this wonderful and lovely world is the food of your contemplation, and living beings who resembles your own nature and are bound to you by similarity of sensations are destined to the nutriment of your affections: united they are consummation of the widest hopes that your mind can contain. By rendering yourselves thus worthy, ye will be as free in your imaginations as the swift and many coloured fowls of the air, and as beautiful in your simplicity as the lilies of the field.

(*PWPBS* 1: 267-68)

Both passages by Shelley share the same ideal that humans or any other creatures are interconnected with Nature. For Shelley, 'this wonderful and lovely world' gives 'hopes' and 'imagination' together with sensuous pleasure to each frame and spirit mediated through the power of sympathy and 'Love,' and establishes a circulatory interrelation among all living things. Helen echoes Shelley's own understanding of Jesus Christ's doctrine, and in this sense, the father is an unacknowledged priest (namely, Father or *Padore*). In this respect, it may not be coincidental that their conversation takes place on 'Resurrection' day (*SP* 224). The friendship between the stranger and Helen and her father figures the hope that loving sympathy may once again freely circulate through society.

Of particular significance in the blind father's speech is the association of the Coliseum's circular-shaped architecture with the circulating spirit of each being, including the father, Helen, and the stranger. This circulatory imagery figured by the shape of the Coliseum and these interpersonal relationships is encouraged by the power

of 'Love' and sympathy with others.<sup>21</sup> This circulatory dynamism symbolised by the Coliseum's shape is then further extended by the father until it embraces the physiological circulation within the human body:

Assuredly, contemplating this monument as I do, though in the mirror of my daughter's mind, I am filled with astonishments and delight; the spirit of departed generations seems to animate my limbs, and circulate through all the fibres of my frame. Stranger, if I have expressed what you have ever felt, let us know each other more. (*SP* 228)

As the father's sentiments imply, his psycho-physiological circulation of delight 'through all the fibres of my frame' enters into the stranger's mind and body. This interpersonal circulation, through the power of sympathy and 'Love,' is contained, for Shelley, within the Coliseum as a further circulatory symbol. This completion of the fragmentary ruins of the Coliseum figures the recreation of the sympathetic power of 'Love' that circulates among all living beings in Nature.<sup>22</sup> This point is further reinforced by the fact that its structure is akin to the harmony of the concentric spheres in Renaissance cosmology.<sup>23</sup> The Coliseum marks a renewed monument to this cyclical interrelation of beings, which is sustained by this creative and divine 'Power'

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<sup>21</sup> See Timothy Clark, 'Shelley's "The Coliseum" and the Sublime,' *Durham University Journal* 54.2 (1993): 231. This circulatory image of the human mind is a common idea in Shelley's use of images as is also seen in his essay 'On Love' (504). See also Binfield, 139-40.

<sup>22</sup> For a similar discussion on the concept of Love and morality, see Shelley's letter to Elizabeth Hitchener on 11 November 1811 (*LPBS* 1: 173).

<sup>23</sup> For the relationship between the macrocosmic harmony in the universe and the microcosmic one in the human body, see S. K. Heninger Jr., *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1974) 187-94. Shelley uses this imagery also in *Queen Mab*: 'How sweet a scene will earth become! / Of purest spirits, a pure dwelling-place, / Symphonious with the planetary spheres' (VI 39-41). The ancient Roman architect Vitruvius refers to a similar symmetrical and proportional correspondence between the human body and architecture (Nature). See Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris Hicky Morgan (1914; New York: Dover, 1960) 72-75.

of 'Love': 'it is thine to unite, to eternize; to make outlive the limits of the grave those who have left among the living memorials of thee' (*SP* 227).<sup>24</sup>

### **Towards a Song Cycle of the Fragmentary**

The harmonious mode of 'Love' or *Eros*, in the Coliseum is complicit with a fragmentary mode, *Thanatos* (the death-drive) of a certain kind, represented by those remnants of violence condoned by ancient civilisations. As we have seen, the stranger's blindness to the implicit presence of the past violence between the two civilisations that has taken place in 'The Coliseum' also relates to disruptive factors in society such as isolation, separation, and death.<sup>25</sup> However, the blind father speaks of the event of death which cannot be evaluated as good or evil and is entirely random and contingent: 'no time, no place, no age, no foresight exempts us from death and the chance of death' (*SP* 227). The father associates the idea of death with sensation:

We have no knowledge if death be a state of sensation, or any precaution that can make those sensations fortunate, if the existing series of events shall not produce that effect. Think not of death, or think of it as something common to us all. It has happened [...] that men have buried their children. (*SP* 227-28)

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<sup>24</sup> This description of 'Love' has the potential to unify humankind as portrayed in Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*: 'Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought, / Of love and might to be divided not, / Compelling the elements with adamant stress' (IV 394-96). Shelley's lines, particularly the 'chain of linked thought,' recall the analogy employed to describe the relationship between the father and Helen which is, ultimately, extended to the stranger.

<sup>25</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin) 73-82. For the interplay of *Eros* and *Thanatos* in *Alastor*, see Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 54-58. Timothy Clark also has paid attention to 'a creative-destructive aesthetic' in Shelley's poetry through a reading of *Julian and Maddalo* and *Adonais* (1821) and so forth (*Embodying Revolution* 175-223). I shall come back to *Eros* and *Thanatos* in *Epipsychidion* Chapter VI.

This passage on *memento mori* verifies Shelley's attitude towards death as 'something common us to all.' Instead, the power of 'Love' can 'unite' and 'eternize' humanity through the succession of life (and its future generations) precisely 'to make outlive the limits of the grave those who have left' (*SP* 227). The father wishes: 'When this frame shall be senseless dust, may the hopes, and the desires, and the delights which animate it now, never be extinguished in my child' (*SP* 227). Nevertheless, every life must pass eventually from the earth. This idea is summarised by Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound*: 'what to bid speak / Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Change?—To these / All things are subject but eternal Love' (II iv 118-20).

The remaining opposition between life (Love or Eros) and death, and between the infinite (unifying or complete) and finite (fragmentary and incomplete), is a coherent idea, or *leitmotif* in Shelley's 'The Coliseum.' This tension further suggests how poetic language always generates and disturbs literary texts, as every literary text entails fragmentation and resists textual closure.<sup>26</sup> Shelley relishes the creative potential of this predicament of textual closure. The Shelley-like stranger (an allegory of the solitary), in 'The Coliseum,' confesses to the father and Helen (who allegorise unification and communion):

Nor have I ever explained the cause of the dress I wear, and the  
difference which I perceive between my language and manners, and

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<sup>26</sup> Timothy Clark remarks that Shelley's 'The Coliseum,' does 'recuperate the fragmentary nature' of 'The Coliseum' as 'the textual monument' as an allegory for reading literary texts ('Shelley after Deconstruction' 104). A decade after Clark, Sarah Peterson reads 'The Coliseum' as Shelley's experiment with 'the capacity for language to reach beyond the details of visual perception' as well as 'the limits of visual perception and of language and, therefore, ultimately of both literal and figurative language.' Sarah Peterson, 'Mediating Vision: Shelley's Prose Encounters with Visual Art,' *The Keats-Shelley Review* 22 (2008): 130.



those with whom I have intercourse—not but that it is painful to me to live without communion with intelligent and affectionate beings. You are such, I feel. (*SP* 228)

The stranger's words suggest that the completeness (Helen and her father) and incompleteness (the stranger) attract one another rather than repulse each another. This also hints at a speculative model for an author-reader relationship dependent upon sympathetic circulation. Indeed, many of Shelley's poems of this period share this leitmotif of a song cycle (*Liederkreis*), as it were, or 'cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men.'<sup>27</sup> As exemplified by its broken circular shape that will be reconstructed in the future, 'The Coliseum' epitomises Shelley's poetics of alternating dynamics between these unifying and fragmentary creative impulses.

## **2. 'Monstrous Figures': Ekphrasis, the Fragmentary, and De-composing Violence in Shelley's 'On the Medusa'**

'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery' (1819) is a poetic fragment by Shelley on the severed Medusa's head, purportedly, painted by Leonardo (see Figure 1). This ekphrastic poem typifies Shelley's dynamics of fragmentation and unity, as the poet-speaker's tropes, although they strive towards a unified condition, unveil the text's fragmentary and incomplete state. Such a fragmentary condition, for the German Romantic critic, Friedrich Schlegel, constitutes '[t]he romantic kind of poetry [which] is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it

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<sup>27</sup> For a similar approach to my argument, see David Ferris, *Schumann's Eichendorff: Liederkreis and the Genre of the Romantic Cycle* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 195.

should forever be becoming and never be perfected [*das sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann*].<sup>28</sup> Schlegel's words also pinpoint a recent theoretical fascination with textual fragmentation and figuration which centres on the uncontrollable power of figurative language. For his own critical purpose, Paul de Man draws on Schlegel's concept of the fragment and a mode of (Romantic) irony called 'permanent parabasis,' which involves the recurrent and regressive 'interruption[s] of the narrative line.'<sup>29</sup> De Man, elsewhere, explains the concept of 'permanent parabasis' when he observes that 'far from closing off the tropological system, irony enforces the repetition of its aberration.'<sup>30</sup>

Since de Man, the ironic and self-destructive aspects of figurative language have

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<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragment*, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1971) 175, trans. of *Athenäums Fragmente*, ed. Ernst Behler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958) 183, vol. 2 of *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 35 vols. to date, gen. ed. Ernst Behler, 1958-.

<sup>29</sup> Schlegel writes: '*Die Ironie ist eine permanente Parekbase*['Irony is a permanent parabasis']. Friedrich Schlegel, 'Fragment 668,' *Philosophische Lehrjahre* 1796-1806, vol. 1, ed. Ernst Behler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1963) 185, vol. 18 of *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Paul de Man, 'The Concept of Irony,' *Aesthetic Ideology*, 178-79. For de Man's earlier thought on the 'permanent parabasis' and the concept of irony in the age of Romanticism (including Schlegel's Romantic irony), see also Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality,' *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, ed. Wlad Godzich 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1983) 208-28. With respect to 'Romantic irony,' Janowitz deftly illustrates the affinity of the Romantic fragment with this concept which 'is the simultaneous operation in literary productions of creation and destruction and joy and scepticism. This co-existent de-creative and re-creative action attests to the vitality of the imagination, and its ability to see the world as passing both in to and out of form.' Anne Janowitz, 'The Romantic Fragment,' *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) 448. See also Ann K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980) 3-30.

<sup>30</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 301. This problematic concerning the ironic and self-destructive aspects of literary language has been taken up by other scholars. Citing 'Ozymandias,' Levinson states that fragments 'tease us into and out of thought by never fully surrendering to our understanding—or, never capitulating to the agencies that enable that understanding' (*The Romantic Fragment Poems* 33).

been taken up by other scholars of Romanticism.<sup>31</sup> Following this kind of interplay between the impulse of closure and its disruption in a given text, J. Hillis Miller reads Shelley's poetry as 'the record of perpetually renewed failure.'<sup>32</sup> Building on Miller, Hugh Roberts interprets Miller's understanding of Shelley's *poiesis* as 'based upon a cycle of entropic ruin.' Roberts, making use of physical terms 'entropy' (disorder or disintegration) and 'negentropy' (keeping order or integration), articulates 'Shelley's poetic of ruin' (444). He explains the ironic mechanism of destructiveness in his poetry, as an alternating movement between the 'sceptical' and 'entropic' (fragmentary), on the one hand, and 'idealist' and 'negentropic' (totalising), on the other (Roberts 482).<sup>33</sup> Robert's notion of 'ruin' could be further extended by acknowledging de Manian 'descriptions of the process as the interplay of the closure and rupture or 'aberration' of the text is at work in Shelley's writing.'<sup>34</sup> The process of figuration and disfiguration exposes an antithetical dynamic between the impulse to univocal textual meaning and the disruption of this unified meaning in a given text, as demonstrated by de Man's essay on 'Shelley Disfigured.' De Man argues that 'this mutilated textual model [*The Triumph of Life* (1820)] exposes the wound of a fracture that lies hidden in all texts.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For a recent study of the fragmentary impulse and Romanticism, see Christopher A. Strathman, *Romantic Poetry and the Fragmentary Imperative: Schlegel, Byron, Joyce, Blanchot* (New York: SUNY, 2006). Stratham deftly summarises contemporary views on the concept of irony discussed by de Man, Abrams, Anne Mellor, McGann, Levinson, and McFarland (8-16).

<sup>32</sup> J. Hillis Miller, 'The Critic as Host,' *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller (New York: Seabury, 1979) 237.

<sup>33</sup> Roberts's notion is inspired by J Hillis Miller's comments on Shelley that 'Shelley's poetry is the record of perpetually renewed failure' ('The Critic as Host' 237).

<sup>34</sup> This aesthetic of Shelley's fragmentary poems can be placed alongside ideas about textual fragmentariness and incompleteness of his age.

<sup>35</sup> Paul de Man, 'Shelley Disfigured,' *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP,

In the case of 'On the Medusa,' Shelley creates his own Medusa as a composite object of violence underpinned not merely by the fragmented condition of the ekphrastic representation of the Medusa's severed head, but also a textual 'fracture,' which is reminiscent of 'the power of death' that de Man perceives in *The Triumph of Life* ('Shelley Disfigured' 122). Shelley's poetic ekphrasis on the Medusa by 'Leonardo' disfigures, fragments, and suspends referential meaning into a series of indeterminate and paralysed—or rather petrified—states.<sup>36</sup> This oscillating interplay between figuration and disfiguration can be understood in terms of the tensions between life and death. Building on James Heffernan's critical account of 'Romantic ekphrasis,' Grant F. Scott considers Shelley's two ekphrastic poems, 'Ozymandias' (1817) and 'On the Medusa,' as deconstructing an 'ideology of transcendence' so that Shelley's Medusa 'extends Wordsworth's beatific frozen moment into a terrifying life sentence' by petrifying the gazer's spirit.<sup>37</sup> This point will be explored by focusing on the tensions between beauty and terror, light and darkness, creation and destruction, life and death, in Shelley's ekphrasis. The alluring visage of the severed Medusa's head and her petrifying gaze almost perfectly exemplify the interactive dynamics between Shelley's

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1984) 120.

<sup>36</sup> For other deconstructive and demystifying interpretations of Shelley's 'On the Medusa' in relation to the aberrant and deviating moment, see Carol Jacobs 'On Looking at Shelley's Medusa,' *Uncontainable Romanticism: Shelley, Brontë, Kleist* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 3-18; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), 171-4; and Forest Pyle, 'Kindling and Ash: Radical Aestheticism in Keats and Shelley,' *Studies in Romanticism* 42.4 (2003): 435-44.

<sup>37</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Politics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 115-24; and Grant F. Scott, *The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts* (Hanover: UP of New England, 1994) 15. After this book, Scott narrowed down his focus to Shelley's 'On the Medusa.' Grant Scott, 'Shelley, Medusa, and the Perils of Ekphrasis,' *The Romantic Imagination: Literature and Art in England and Germany*, ed. Frederick Burwick and Jürgen Klein (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) 315-32.

aesthetic composition of poetry (as well as verbal painting) and its self-destructive de-composition.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 1. Anonymous [Unknown Flemish Artist of the 16th Century], *Head of Medusa*, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, from *On The Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Melissa J. Sites, *The Romantic Circles Electronic Editions*, January 1998, 2 March 2011 <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/figA.html>>.

### Composing Beauty and Horror: The Aestheticisation of the Fragment

The first line of ‘On the Medusa’ introduces the nocturnal scene surrounding the Medusa’s head, in ‘the midnight sky’ (1):

It lieth, gazing on the midnight sky,

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<sup>38</sup> I owe the double meaning of the word ‘composition’ to Benjamin Colbert’s comments on the earlier version of this section as a paper delivered at the *Romantic Visual Cultures* conference in March 2009 (held at the University of Cardiff).

Upon the cloudy mountain-peak supine;  
 Below, far lands are seen tremblingly;  
 Its horror and its beauty are divine.  
 Upon its lips and eyelids seems to lie  
 Loveliness like a shadow, from which shine,  
 Fiery and lurid, struggling underneath,  
 The agonies of anguish and of death. (1-8)<sup>39</sup>

The obscure backdrop both underpins the horror of her physical decapitation by Perseus and underlines by contrast Medusa's peculiar beauty itself.<sup>40</sup> The neuter form of 'It' (1) and 'Its' (4) indicates that Medusa's severed head is apparently exhibited not as a gendered creature, but as a sexless object, within this dark backdrop as another picture-frame. In spite of this, Medusa's 'lips and eyelids' (5) still exhibit her 'beauty' (4) and 'Loveliness' (6) written on every surface of her visage. This 'Loveliness' is now 'like a shadow' (5) subduing the 'agonies of anguish and of death' (8). Indeed, the very contrast between her beautiful 'lips,' 'eyelids,' and the glare of 'agonies of anguish and of death' (8) produces the majestic 'horror' that affirms a sense of sublimity in her beautiful countenance.<sup>41</sup> This sublime effect, created by the painting's commingling of 'horror and beauty,' intensifies, or even 'shrine[s]' (6), its 'divine' (4) attribute.<sup>42</sup> At the

<sup>39</sup> All quotations from 'On the Medusa' except an additional stanza contained in one of the *Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts* (adds. d.7) are from the following text, Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci, In the Florentine Gallery,' *POS*, 3:221-23.

<sup>40</sup> For the psychological effects of the sublime caused by darkness and obscurity before the age of Shelley, see Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry* 53-59.

<sup>41</sup> Praz's *The Romantic Agony* describes this mutilated figure of Medusa as a symbol of a comprised Romantic aesthetics of 'Beauty tainted with pain, corruption, and death' through a dialectic effect of the beautiful and the sublime (45). For the relations between the sublime and pain or torment, see also Burke, 30-33, 36, 79.

<sup>42</sup> The word 'shine' (7) was corrected from 'shrine' in 1847, though the word 'shrine,' which is directly linked to deities, sounds more powerful and produces the more sublime and divine effect of the portrait. Cf. Keats' *Lamia* (1820): 'Thus loaded with a feast the tables stood, / Each shrining in the midst the image of a God' (II. 189-90). John Keats, *The Poems of John Keats*, ed.

same time, these words related to divinity dimly echo Medusa's original beauty before she was transformed into her present monstrous form. Medusa had once been a beautiful priestess of Minerva's temple as related in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, wherein she was subjugated to various kinds of violence and 'agonies' prior to Perseus's slaying, for instance, Neptune's violation of Medusa and Minerva's punishment which transformed her exquisite golden locks into vipers (IV 793-801).<sup>43</sup>

The painting's sublime beauty, in which coexists the monstrous form and beautiful woman, is then depicted through imagery connected with psychological paralysis or mental petrification. Medusa's violent and violated gaze immobilises the transfixed and fascinated beholder. The aesthetic tension of beauty and horror is harmonised in Shelley's description of the Medusa's head:

Yet it is less the horror than the grace  
Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone  
Whereon the lineaments of that dead face  
Are graven, till the characters be grown  
Into itself, and thought no more can trace;  
'Tis the melodious hues of beauty thrown  
Athwart the darkness and the glare of pain,  
Which humanize and harmonize the strain. (9-16)

Since this is a poetic representation of a pictorial representation of Medusa, the onlooker cannot be physically petrified by the Gorgon's lethal gaze. Instead, the

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Jack Stillinger (Cambridge MA: Belknap, 1982) 356. All quotations from Keats's poetry are taken from this edition.

<sup>43</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1971) 1:234-35. All quotations from *Metamorphoses* are taken from this edition. The line numbers are from the original Latin text.

onlooker's 'spirit' (10) is turned into 'stone' (10) by its 'grace' (9) rather than its 'horror.' The Medusa's image is carved or engraved so intensely onto the viewer-poet's mesmerised mind that the more he attempts to withdraw from the contours of Medusa's 'dead face' (11), the more his mind is enslaved and petrified until 'thought no more can trace.'

In order to emphasise this mesmerising effect, the speaker employs a musical metaphor of 'the melodious hues of beauty' (12). The word 'strain' (16) also enhances the manner in which the head's 'melodious hue' (14) embellishes its countenance and intoxicates the viewer's spirit.<sup>44</sup> The viewer-poet employs an ekphrastic trope of music (another form of art), in order to shape his verbal painting or sculpture. On the one hand, painting and sculpture (including relief) belong to the spatial arts, which relate to stillness. On the other, music and poetry as temporal arts are dependent on the succession of sounds. Since ekphrasis is painting by poetry in the classical tradition of *ut pictura poesis* ('as is painting, so is poetry'), it lends temporality—narrative-time—to the painting of Medusa's head in order to lead and guide the listener's mental (imaginative) eye to the features of the verbal-painter's composition and arrangement. Shelley's ekphrasis employs not merely a variety of

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<sup>44</sup> Carol Jacobs, citing Daniel Hughes's article, reads this 'strain' as the 'strain of poetry or music' (202n12); Daniel Hughes, 'Shelley, Leonardo, and the Monsters of Thought,' *Criticism* 12.3 (1970): 204-5. In *Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence*, Shelley describes the statues of *Bacchus and Ampelus* in a similar way to the Medusa's head: 'Like some fine strain of harmony which flows round the soul and enfolds it and leaves it in the soft astonishment of a satisfaction, like the pleasure of love with one whom we must love, which having taken away desire, leaves pleasure, sweet pleasure' Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Notes on Sculptures in Rome and Florence*, SP, 348. Likewise, in *Rosalind and Helen*, Shelley employs the word 'strain' in the sense of musical sounds four times (893, 1021, 1104, 1168).



sensuous imagery, but also a variety of art forms which manage to ‘humanize and harmonize’ (16) the painting of Medusa’s head through the word ‘strain’ in all senses of the meaning of the word—in relation to both poetry and music. The synaesthetic effect of visual and auditory sensation works through a cinematographic sequence, in which the dead creature’s head is gradually recuperated by the ‘humanised’ power of the ‘melodious hue.’ In other words, the ‘dead face’ of a dangerous and dreadful creature begins to be metamorphosed into a woman’s alluring ‘countenance’ (39) as the reader is enchanted by the harmonised ‘strain.’ Here the word ‘strain’ has a double meaning. The harmoniously flowing ‘strain’ (melody) of the head’s grace, momentarily, soothes and aestheticises the ‘strain’ of its dying body and the transfixed observer through the multi-layered texture of Shelley’s ekphrastic composition.

However, Shelley’s repetition of the word ‘strain’ reintroduces the previous tension between beauty and the horror by focusing on those serpents on the Medusa’s head when they are likened to the ‘grass out of a watery rock’ (18):

And from its head as from one body grow,  
As [ ] grass out of a watery rock,  
Hairs which are vipers, and they curl and flow,  
And their long tangles in each other lock,  
And with unending involutions show  
Their mailèd radiance, as it were to mock  
The torture and the death within, and saw  
The solid air with many a ragged jaw.

And from a stone beside, a poisonous eft  
Peeps idly into those Gorgonian eyes;

Whilst in the air a ghastly bat, bereft  
 Of sense, has flitted with a mad surprise  
 Out of the cave this hideous light had cleft,  
 And he comes hastening like a moth that hies  
 After a taper; and the midnight sky  
 Flares, a light more dread than obscurity. (17-32)

The depiction of the 'vipers' (19) both dazzles and strains the onlooker's eye by their 'long tangles [...] with unending involutions' (21).<sup>45</sup> This recurrent image of the entangled vipers reinforces their writhing, which implies an inseparable link between beauty (the Medusa's face) and terror (the 'vipers'). This point is highlighted by the poet's use of masculine rhymes from line 17 to 24, which unify 'grow' (1) and 'flow' (3), 'rock' (2) and 'lock' (4). All of these male rhymes accentuate the masculine trait of the vipers' 'mailed radiance' (22) which, like a suit of armour, creates a strong tension between the femininity of Medusa's beautiful countenance and the masculinity of the threatening serpents in her terrible form (this perilous contact also evokes Satan's temptation of Eve in the guise of a serpent). Such terror is then supplemented and substantiated by other creatures such as 'a poisonous eft' (25), 'a ghostly bat' (27), and a fluttering 'moth' (30) which is figuratively added to the painting to enrich his ekphrastic poem. All of these creatures are necessary for the composition and arrangement of the painting. As the backdrop, a lurid and alluring firmament of 'the midnight sky [which] /

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<sup>45</sup> William Hildebrand differently interprets this 'spell of dizziness.' For Hildebrand, through a kind of 'self-duplicity' between the onlooker and the Medusa's head gazing upon the onlooker, 'Medusa becomes, in other words, a vertiginous experience of something unreflected, unmediated, ultimate.' William Hildebrand, 'Self, Beauty and Horror: Shelley's Medusa Moment,' *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, ed. G. Kim Blank (New York: St. Martin's, 1991) 159.

Flares, a light more dread than obscurity' (31-32), foregrounds 'those Gorgonian eyes' (26) as well as 'the chiaroscuro' of the serpents' 'mailed radiance.'<sup>46</sup>

This re-introduction of the 'midnight sky'—its first appearance occurs in line 1—further accentuates the Medusa's state of beauty-in-horror (or life-in-death) existence:

'Tis the tempestuous loveliness of terror;  
For from the serpents gleams a brazen glare  
Kindled by that inextricable error  
Which makes a thrilling vapour of the air  
Become a [ ] and ever-shifting mirror  
Of all the beauty and the terror there—  
A woman's countenance, with serpent locks,  
Gazing in death on heaven from those wet rocks. (33-40)<sup>47</sup>

In this passage, Medusa's beautiful mien seems to be tainted by the tangles of 'serpents' (34), but, paradoxically, the very snakes themselves heighten the 'tempestuous loveliness of terror' (33) in her visage. The 'serpents' visually lead the onlooker astray, with their 'unending involution' to the point of being caught up in a 'tempestuous' and dazzling vortex in which the onlooker's 'thought no more can trace' (13) the shape of the Medusa's head arrayed in this majestic terror. This swirling effect is even increased by the poet's phrase, 'inextricable error,' which alludes to the complexity of Daedalus's labyrinth, described in Latin in Virgil's *Aeneid* as '*inextricabilis error*.'<sup>48</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> At this point, Scott, in 'Shelley, Medusa, and the Perils of Ekphrasis,' also notes the deliberate contrast between the motion of the snakes and 'the placid, frozen mien of the Gorgon' (327).

<sup>47</sup> As Pyle points out, the intricacy of the syntax also embodies that of the viper's tangling ('Kindling and Ash' 443).

<sup>48</sup> Neville Rogers compares '*inextricabilis error*' in Virgil's *Aeneid* (VI 27). Neville Rogers,

‘unending involutions’ of these vipers, ironically, create an irresolvable tension between the beauty and horror in this living-dead figure to the extent that the vipers become an ‘inextricable error’ in relation to the Medusa’s head—an necessary error that taints its beauty and highlights its sublimity at once. On another level, these erroneous horrors make Medusa’s face all the more beautiful through its divinely horrific and sublime effect.<sup>49</sup>

This is the crucial moment at which the beheaded woman’s complexion and the vipers coalesce into a single aesthetic object of sublime beauty. The word ‘glare’ (34) here takes on a double meaning. In the darkness of ‘midnight,’ Medusa’s ‘brazen glare’ is ‘[k]indled’ (35) by the ‘glar[ing]’ brass-colour of the vipers’ ‘mailed radiance,’ which turns a ‘vapour of the air’ (36) into an ‘ever-shifting mirror / Of all the beauty and the terror’ (37-8).<sup>50</sup> This specular vapour-like ‘mirror’ emitted from Medusa’s mouth, in a sense, brings to its culmination of the intermixed effect of her beauty and terror through an ‘ever-shifting’ reflection of the Medusa’s glare. The vipers both disfigure Medusa’s beautiful face and provide the onlooker with the ‘ever-shifting mirror’ in which he sees ‘those Gorgonian eyes’ (26), just as Perseus looked upon her in the reflection of his shield. This vaporous mirror enables the mesmerised subject (the onlooker-poet) to separate himself from the perceived object (the Medusa’s head), to come to his senses

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‘Shelley and the Visual Arts,’ *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 12 (1961): 16.

<sup>49</sup> Shelley discusses in *A Defence of Poetry* that ‘[p]oetry turns all things to loveliness exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed: it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things’ (*SPP* 533).

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion concerned with the word ‘[k]indled,’ see Pyle, ‘Kindling and Ash’ 443-44.

and recognise himself.<sup>51</sup> Only through this mirror-glass, is the enchanted viewer, who is susceptible to the trap of an entangled relationship between subject and object, capable of looking at that petrifying face from a safer perspective. This enables the observer to evaluate the Medusa's head objectively and aesthetically as an *objet d'art*.<sup>52</sup> To be sure, the original painting of the Medusa in the Uffizi gallery never portrays such a reflection of her countenance in the looking-glass of the vapours but, in order to introduce a new composition to show the Medusa's entire face and derive 'all the beauty and the terror' from her, Shelley's ekphrasis alters—or de-composes—the original composition of the painting in which the Medusa's head 'lieth gazing on the midnight sky' (1). Through this effect, Shelley's mutilated Medusa can be rendered as a more organically unified form in Shelley's imaginative ekphrasis.

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<sup>51</sup> John Hollander similarly says that the onlooker of the Medusa as its victim 'seems momentarily safe from the monster's gaze which, however, has turned the very air into a mirror.' John Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 145. In 'Shelley, Medusa, and the Perils of Ekphrasis,' Grant Scott also states that Shelley's Medusa poem 'acknowledges what the artist tries so desperately to conceal through his preoccupation with marginalia—that in the very middle of the composition, emphasized by the intersection of the painting's most prominent diagonals, we encounter Medusa's eye or 'I' (328).

<sup>52</sup> See Kant's discussion on the sublime effect of tempestuous terror and horror in relation to safety:

The *astonishment* amounting almost to terror, the horror and sacred awe, that seizes us when gazing upon the prospect of mountains ascending to heaven, deep ravines and torrents raging there, deep-shadowed solitudes that invite to brooding melancholy, and the like—all this, when we are assured of our own safety, is not actual fear. Rather is it an attempt to gain access to it through imagination, for the purpose of feeling the might of this faculty in combining the movement of the mind thereby aroused with its serenity, and of thus being superior to internal and, therefore, to external, nature, so far as the latter can have any bearing upon our feeling of well-being. For the imagination, in accordance with laws of association, makes our state of contentment dependent upon physical conditions.

(*Critique of Judgement* 99 [140])

Making use of this special mirror, the viewer-poet can see the 'torrents raging' of the Medusa's 'tempestuous loveliness' from a safer point.

## From Medusa to Orpheus: De-composing the Fragmentary

The onlooker-poet's fascination with the totalising and dialectical impulse at work in the painting of Medusa's head is underlined by another fragmentary piece related to Shelley's 'On the Medusa' found in his notebook:

It is a woman's countenance divine  
With everlasting beauty breathing there  
Which from a stormy mountain's peak, supine  
Gazes into the nights [*sic*] trembling air.  
It is a trunkless head, and on its feature  
Death has met life, but there is life in death,  
The blood is frozen—but unconquered Nature  
Seems struggling to the last—without a breath  
The fragment of an uncreated creature[.] (41-48)<sup>53</sup>

This 'woman's countenance' (41) is motionless 'without a breath' (47) but her 'unconquered Nature [which] / Seems struggling to the last' (46-47) manifests itself as in her 'breathing' (42) with 'everlasting beauty' (42). This paradox of 'breathing' without breath is revealing about the very moment of Medusa's death. Her disfiguration is suspended and framed by the onlooker as a still-life composition, which staves off her demise and de-composition within the frame of Shelley's sculptural-relief in words.<sup>54</sup> Shelley's rhetorical figures transmogrify the Medusa's head into an

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<sup>53</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. d.7: A Facsimile Edition with Full Transcription and Textual Notes*, ed. Irving Massey (New York: Garland, 1987) 197, 203, vol. 2 of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, Donald H. Reiman gen. ed., 23 vols. 1986-2002.

<sup>54</sup> This recuperative attempt could be aroused by the same 'romantic pity for the wrongs, and a passionate exculpation of the horrible deed' which Shelley explicates in his preface to *The Cenci*. Shelley states in his preface to *The Cenci*: 'the feelings of the company never failed to incline to a romantic pity for the wrongs, and a passionate exculpation of the horrible deed to which they urged her, who has been mingled two centuries with the common dust' (*POS* 2:729). Admittedly, McGann interprets that the Medusa's 'terrible head which first threatened Goethe and Shelley' becomes, in William Morris, romantically domesticated' as 'a sentimental

aesthetic—literally breathtaking—monument, in which ‘[d]eath has met life, but there is life in death’ (46). This suspension or crystallisation of temporality through his verbal painting or sculptural-relief in the poem (as both plastic art and temporal object) resembles Keats’s ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ (1820), wherein two lovers, tantalisingly, anticipate postponed fulfilment:

Bold lover, never, never, canst thou kiss,  
 Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;  
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (17-20)<sup>55</sup>

Like the ‘Lover,’ who can ‘never’ reach the maiden in Keats’s ode, Shelley’s onlooker-poet in ‘On the Medusa’ conserves the feminised and aestheticised countenance of the Medusa as the ‘fragment of an uncreated creature’ (48) yet to be

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figure,’ but Shelley’s Medusa seems still ‘sentimental’ here because of his empathy with Medusa’s fate as well as Beatrice’s. Jerome J. McGann, ‘The Beauty of the Medusa: A Study in Romantic Literary Iconology,’ *Studies in Romanticism* 11.1 (1972): 20-21. In his ‘Essay on the Punishment of Death’ (c. 1815), Shelley expresses similar sentiments about a persecuted woman:

Murder, rapes, extensive schemes of plunder are the actions of persons belonging to this class; and death is the penalty of conviction. But the coarseness of organization peculiar to men capable of committing acts wholly selfish is usually found to be associated with a proportionate insensibility to fear or pain. Their sufferings communicate to those of the spectators, who may be liable to the commission of similar crimes, a sense of the lightness of that event when closely examined, which, at a distance, as uneducated persons are accustomed to do, probably they regarded with horror.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘On the Punishment of Death,’ *SP*, 156.

<sup>55</sup> In such a de-contextualised artefact ‘in rarefied and timeless environment,’ says Scott, ‘the Romantics make up for the artwork’s lost context with their own aesthetic and psychological response to the artwork’ (*The Sculpted Word* 16). Sandy interprets this aestheticisation of the dead Medusa not as the immortal mystification but as ‘the mortal tragedy of transience and death,’ as well as Keats’s ‘Grecian Urn,’ by drawing on Nietzsche’s modes of the Apollonian and Dionysian (See Sandy, *Poetics of Self* 81). For another discussion about the imagery of such opposite pairs as death and life, pain and pleasure, which engenders ‘the seventh ambiguity’ in reading Keats’s poetry, see William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1936; London: Hogarth, 1984) 214-15.

completed, by crystallising the Medusa head's sublime beauty in an enthusiastic and even rhapsodical style. In this respect, it is no mere coincidence that the word 'rhapsodical,' as the *OED* defines it, signifies not only the 'extremely enthusiastic or ecstatic in also language, manner, etc.' (2), but also a 'fragmentary or disconnected in style' (1).

The fragmentary character of the Medusa's head renders this ekphrastic incomplete. The textual blanks in 'On the Medusa' leave grammatical ambiguities, which hint towards the possibility of its own decomposition by the reader. A complex tension between beauty and terror in the image of Medusa blurs the actual referential meaning of the phrase 'brazen glare' which, in this context, equally describes the vipers' brass-coloured glare and Medusa's ashen complexion.<sup>56</sup> In 'On the Medusa,' Shelley's mode of ekphrasis reveals contradictory impulses between composition and decomposition, mystification and demystification, or rehabilitation and destruction. These contradictory impulses are played out through the indeterminacy of Shelley's restorative figural representations of the Medusa which, in a bid to restore or recompose her former beauty, ironically, disclose those decomposing and demystifying impulses contained within these apparently recuperative figures. In this sense, the viewer-poet of 'On the Medusa' acknowledges the potential of the creative and composing power of poetic language in the Medusa head's 'unconquered Nature,' which resists the power of death as an uncontrollable and decomposing imperative

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<sup>56</sup> De Man argues in *Allegories of Reading* that '[r]hetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration' (10).



embodied in the serpents of the Medusa head.

Shelley as the viewer of the painted Medusa uses the limitations of figurative language as a means to salvage beauty from the ravishment of death. The onlooker, in this respect, recalls another mythological figure, Orpheus, in that the poet can never recuperate his ideal beauty on earth, like Orpheus's lost wife, Eurydice, who is also a victim of a snake (Medusa is a victim in a sense that her beautiful tresses were deformed into snakes). What is more, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus is, subsequently, dismembered by furious Mænads due to his rejection of women other than Eurydice (XI 50-53).<sup>57</sup> This dismemberment corresponds with the organic unity of figurative language which is, inevitably, disfigured and torn into pieces by the uncontrollable nature and power of language.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, Shelley continues to create poetry as Orpheus's severed head keeps singing even after its dismemberment. The passage in Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* is a manifestation of the poet's belief in such poetic power:

Language is a perpetual Orphic song  
Which rules with Dædal harmony a throng

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<sup>57</sup> For the assimilation of a Mænad to Medusa, see also McGann, 'The Beauty of the Medusa' 6. The frantic nature of the Medusa and Mænads can also be read in terms of the relationship between Shelley's radical politics and the French revolution. For Shelley's Medusa and his revolutionary thoughts, see Barbara Judson, 'The Politics of Medusa: Shelley's Physiognomy of Revolution,' *ELH* 68 (2001): 135-54; and Sophie Thomas, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 161-5. Both Judson and Thomas's works are based on Neil Hertz's psychoanalytical approach to relations between the revolutionary violence and the representation of the Medusa imagery in the age of the French Revolution (Jacobinism) and its aftermath. Neil Hertz, 'Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria under Political Pressure,' *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 161-93.

<sup>58</sup> De Man similarly employs a metaphor of 'the human body': 'We must, in short, consider our limbs, hands, toes, [...] in themselves, severed from the organic unity of the body.' Paul de Man, 'Phenomenality and materiality in Kant,' *Aesthetic Ideology*, 88.

Of thought and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were. (IV 415-7)

Shelley uses two symbolic mythological characters, Orpheus and Dædalus, to represent the formative power of poetry and the human imagination to shape something ‘senseless and shapeless’ into (poetic) form (IV 417).<sup>59</sup> By harmonising ‘throngs / Of thought and forms’ (IV 416-17), figurative language or poetic form as ‘a perpetual Orphic song’ (IV 415) will be heard and read by the world through succeeding generations—powered by the cycle of life (composition) and death (de-composition)—as Ovid calls *Metamorphoses* ‘a continuous song from nature’s first / Remote beginnings to our modern times’ (I 3-4).

Shelley’s description of language as ‘a continuous song’ recalls Schlegel’s sense of poetry as eternally ‘becoming and never [...] perfected.’ Paradoxically, one way of completing a poem is to leave it in a fragmented or unfinished state. Shelley’s use of the fragmentary and incompleteness ensures that ‘On the Medusa’ is only completed by the unity between the poem’s own formal and textual characteristics of the fragmentary. In a similar vein to Schlegel, in *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley comments on poetic composition as ‘a miniature work of art’: ‘The parts of a composition may be poetical, without the composition as a whole being a poem. A single sentence may be considered as a whole though it may be found in the midst of a series of unassimilated portions; a single word even may be a spark of inextinguishable thought’ (*SPP* 515).

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<sup>59</sup> In *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley never differentiates between poetry and prose on the grounds that ‘language itself is poetry’ in his poetics (*SPP* 512). Elsewhere in this essay, Shelley admires Dante, who ‘created a language, in itself music and persuasion, out of a chaos of inharmonious barbarians. He was the congregator of those great spirits who presided over the resurrection of learning’ (*SPP* 528).

De-composition is a prerequisite to Shelley's ekphrastic composition, as the viewer-poet observes that '[d]eath has met life, but there is life in death.' As such, the Medusa's head still remains the 'fragment of an uncreated creature.' Shelley's poetry thus exposes the presence of violent or self-destructive forces within the poetic forms of ruin which are closely connected with a totalising impulse in Shelley's aesthetic response to artefacts, fragments, and ruins.

## Chapter V

### **‘They Felt the Spirit from Her Glowing Fingers’: Touch, Sympathy, and Organic Happiness in ‘The Sensitive-Plant’**

Socrates: Heraclitus says somewhere that ‘everything gives way and nothing stands fast,’ and, likening the things that are to the flowing (*rhoē*) of a river, he says that ‘you cannot step into the same river twice.’

—Plato, *Cratylus*—

And Science, and her sister Poesy,  
Shall clothe in light the fields and cities of the free!

—Shelley, *Leon and Cythna*—

Let me love the trees—the skies & the ocean & ~~all~~ that all encompassing spirit of which I may soon become a part—let me in my ~~love~~ fellow creatures love that which is & not ~~imagine~~ fix my ~~love~~ affections on a fair form endued with imaginary attributes—where goodness, kindness & talent are, let me love & admire them [...]

—Mary Shelley *Journals*—

### **Shelley and Erasmus Darwin**

This chapter investigates the idiosyncratic imagery of tactile or kinetic sensation in Shelley’s ‘The Sensitive-Plant,’ a poem on the sensitive plant, or *Mimosa pudica* (‘chaste,’ ‘shy,’ or ‘modest mimosa’), a plant symbolic of the sense of touch especially in eighteenth-century literary culture. Robert Maniquis’s reading of ‘The Sensitive-Plant’ highlights its imaginative representation of Nature’s organic economy

rooted in contemporary scientific observation.<sup>1</sup> My focus is on Shelley's debt to Erasmus Darwin's writings on natural philosophical subjects such as botany, biology, and physiology, discussed in *The Botanic Garden* (1798), *The Temple of Nature* (1803), and other works.<sup>2</sup> Shelley describes the sensitive plant not merely in terms of pathetic fallacy (as an image of a shy woman), but as an instance which blurs the boundary between animal and plant grounded in certain natural philosophical observations of the time. My approach provides an insight into a cosmological worldview shared between 'The Sensitive-Plant' and Darwin's concept of 'organic happiness.' The term 'organic happiness' was first paid attention to by King-Hele who defined it as 'The capacity for happiness is greatest, he [Darwin] says, among the higher animals [...] but the capacity for enjoyment extends right down the scale to smaller animals, insects, and even plants' ('Shelley and Erasmus Darwin' 204).<sup>3</sup> Although King-Hele also briefly mentions

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Maniquis, 'The Puzzling Mimosa: Sensitivity and Plant Symbols in Romanticism,' *Studies in Romanticism* 8.3 (1969): 150. As a predecessor of Maniquis, Philip C. Ritterbush regards Shelley's 'The Sensitive-Plant' as 'an emblem of all organisms aflame with love,' by citing a line from *Adonais*: 'All baser things pant with a sacred thirst' (169). Philip C. Ritterbush, *Overture to Biology: The Speculations of Eighteenth-Century Naturalists* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1964) 206.

<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, Shelley's personal letters report that he immersed himself in *The Botanic Garden* and ordered *The Temple of Nature* in 1811 (*LPBS* 1: 129). For Darwin's influence on Shelley's poetry (in particular *Prometheus Unbound*), see Grabo, *A Newton among Poets* 30-79; and Desmond King-Hele, 'Shelley and Erasmus Darwin,' *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, ed. Kelvin Everest (Totowa: Barnes, 1983) 129-46 and *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986) 197. Yet King-Hele also add that '[i]n tone and philosophical quality, Shelley's poem is at some distance from Darwin' (210).

<sup>3</sup> In *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets*, King-Hele also explains this concept: 'each organic being as possessed of a quota of happiness, whence his concept of "organic happiness" and the idea that evolution tends to enhance organic happiness' (23). After this, King-Hele time after time refers to this concept: 'Of course there is much more than evolution in *The Temple of Nature*. Darwin propounds his philosophy of organic happiness: he believes all creatures great and small enjoy life; that each life (including the plants) adds a little to the total of happiness; and that the survival of the fittest is, by and large, the survival of the happiest.' Desmond King-Hele, 'The 1997 Wilkins Lecture: Erasmus Darwin, the Lunatics and Evolution,' *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 52.1 (1998): 175. Elsewhere, King-Hele mentions

Shelley's fascination with Darwin's idea of 'organic happiness' as well as its possible influence on 'The Sensitive-Plant,' further examination of the point has not been fully explored in Shelley studies ('Shelley and Erasmus Darwin' 204). This chapter re-examines and complements this point, by focusing on Shelley's own poetic thoughts concerning (human) nature rooted in a psycho-physiological sensibility or sympathy that 'touches' the human heart.

## 1. Beyond a Chaste Lady: *Mimosa Pudica* and Respiration

### The Tradition of *Mimosa Pudica* as a Lady and Shelley's Depiction as an Infant

When considering Shelley's poetics of sensibility, his elusive poem, 'The Sensitive-Plant,' exemplifies his notion of sensibility in the sense that Shelley's image of the sensitive plant reflects his own sensibility.<sup>4</sup> This was also the case in the age of sensibility. Hannah More's poem 'Sensibility' explicates the close relationship between sensibility and morality in the 'age of sensibility': 'Thou [sensibility] hasty moral,

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Darwin: 'In Canto IV [of *The Temple of Nature*], "Of Good and Evil," he [Darwin] sets up "the Seraph Sympathy" to be admired, [and] offers a secular moralist of "Do as you would be done by," and expounds his ideas of "organic happiness" and the "bliss of being."' Desmond King-Hele, 'Prologue: Catching Up with Erasmus Darwin in the New Century,' *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. C. U. M. Smith and Robert Arnott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 28. Although not exploring this relationship between Shelley and Darwin, Ashton Nichols, who also refers to the idea of 'organic happiness,' shares my view in his assertion: 'What is new in a poet like Shelley is the sense of how an emotion like pleasure can organically link humans with the nonhuman world.' Ashton Nichols, 'The Loves of Plants and Animals: Romantic Science and the Pleasures of Nature,' *Romanticism & Ecology*, ed. James McKusick, November, 2001, Para.12, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, 10 March 2011 <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/ecology/nichols/nichols.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> In a letter, Shelley alludes to himself as a *Mimosa pudica*: 'the Exotic who unfortunately belonging to the order of mimosa thrives ill in so large a society' (*LPBS* 2: 368). See Carlos Baker, *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1948) 195-202.

sudden sense of right! / Thou untaught goodness! Virtue's precious seed!' (246-7).<sup>5</sup>

Given this (con)text, it is not a coincidence that the sensitive plant appears so frequently in the literature of this period. The botanical name of the sensitive plant, *Mimosa pudica*, comes from its characteristic reaction to exterior stimuli, by folding its parallel rows of leaves in on themselves. Originally from South America, this exotic plant's sensitivity that drew eighteenth-century writers' attention was established as a literary icon of sensibility. For example, the speaker in the poem 'A New Morality' (1798) by George Canning and George Ellis addresses 'Sensibility' employing the metaphor of *Mimosa pudica* (119-24).<sup>6</sup> All of these metaphorical associations are visually encapsulated in George Romney's contemporary painting entitled *Sensibility* (1789).<sup>7</sup>

Within this tradition, it was common among eighteenth-century poets to personify this plant as a woman. In William Cowper's 'The Poet, the Oyster, and Sensitive Plant,' the plant is addressed as 'you, my Lady Squeamish, / Who reckon ev'ry touch a blemish' (55-56).<sup>8</sup> Charlotte Smith's short poem, 'The Mimosa' in *Conversations Introducing Poetry* (1804), regards this plant's sensitiveness as 'not reserve, but

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<sup>5</sup> In *Sensibility: A Poem* (1789), Thomas Hall addresses sensibility as a feminine figure: 'fair Patroness of th' liberal arts [...] the Muse ambitious soars' (58, 60). Thomas Hall, *Sensibility. A Poem*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1789).

<sup>6</sup> George Canning and George Ellis, 'A New Morality,' *The Anti-Jacobin, or Weekly Examiner* 2 (1798): 623-40. For detailed analysis of the political aspect of this poem, see Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 192-98.

<sup>7</sup> George Romney, *Sensibility*, London, 1789 [From the Original Picture, in the Possession of William Hayley, Esqr.], National Maritime Museum, London, *Walter Collection*, 21. Nov. 2010 <<http://www.nmm.ac.uk/collections/prints/viewPrint.cfm?ID=PAF3635>>.

<sup>8</sup> William Cowper, 'The Poet, the Oyster, and Sensitive Plant,' *The Poems of William Cowper: 1748-1782*, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) 436.

affectation' (25).<sup>9</sup> In all these poems, the sensitive plant figures in a heterosexual romance. Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* is an encyclopaedic botanical poem in which various kinds of plant including the sensitive plant are personified and described with more scientific precision than in other poems:

Weak with nice sense, the chaste MIMOSA stands,  
 From each rude touch withdraws her timid hands;  
 [.....]  
 Shuts her sweet eye-lids to approaching night,  
 And hails with freshen'd charms the rising light.  
 (I 299-300, 305-06)<sup>10</sup>

Darwin uses the metaphor of a 'chaste' (299) lady to convey *Mimosa pudica*'s sensitive reaction to external stimuli and the light. Such chastity is a typical poetic attribute of *Mimosa pudica*, frequently associated with female sensibility and moral purity in the second half of the eighteenth century. The word 'chaste' is—naturally but ironically—indicative of potential sexual relationship. Darwin continues in the following vein: 'Slow to the mosque she moves, an eastern bride [...] / Queen of the bright seraglio of her Lord' (I. 308, 310). Darwin's 'chaste MIMOSA' (I 299) is portrayed here sensually employing a typical orientalist metaphor dependent on the number of the plant's pistils or female organs. Darwin's depiction of the sensitive plant is deeply influenced by the eighteenth-century botanist Carl von Linné (Carolus Linnaeus). Darwin's metaphor of the 'seraglio' is derived from the Linnean botanical classification,

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<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Smith, 'The Mimosa,' *Conversations Introducing Poetry, The Works of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Judith Pascoe, vol. 13 (London: Pickering, 2007) 93.

<sup>10</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden, A Poem, in Two Parts; Containing the Economy of Vegetation and The Loves of the Plants. With Philosophical Notes* (1791; London, 1825) 145.



according to which the sensitive plant is '[o]f the class Polygamy, one house [which means that the plant has both stamens and pistils but not in the same place]' (I. 301n). In *The Loves of the Plants*, where 'the Sexual System of Linneus [*sic*] is explained, alongside the remarkable properties of many particular plants,' Darwin portrays the image of the sensitive plant as a compound of both Linnaean eighteenth-century botanical classification and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>11</sup>

By contrast to these conventions of the poetic representation of *Mimosa pudica* among eighteenth-century authors, Shelley offers in 'The Sensitive-Plant' a greatly defeminised portrayal of the plant. According to both Darwin and Shelley, both sensitive plants wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night, but Shelley elects to emphasise the botanic and biological functions of the plant:

A Sensitive-plant in a garden grew,  
And the young winds fed it with silver dew,  
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light  
And closed them beneath the kisses of night. (I 1-4)

Shelley's paratactic style with the simple conjunction 'and' foregrounds the mechanical movement of the 'Sensitive-plant' (1) which opens and closes like a fan. In comparison to the feminine movement of the 'eye-lid' in Darwin's *Mimosa pudica*, Shelley's Sensitive-plant is portrayed not as a lady with a fan, but as the fan itself.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Shelley's Sensitive-plant receives a kiss from the 'night' (4) as if bestowed by a mother to her child, recalling the goddess Nyx from Greek mythology. Shelley's speaker

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<sup>11</sup> Darwin, Advertisement, *The Botanic Garden*, v, and Proem, *The Loves of the Plants* vii.

<sup>12</sup> Hereafter I call it 'Sensitive-plant' as a proper noun to differentiate this recreated plant by Shelley from the sensitive plant in general.

alludes to this Sensitive-plant with the neutral pronoun 'its' like a baby or infant, whereas the speaker in Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* describes his *Mimosa pudica* as ladylike, using the feminine pronoun 'her.' The femininity of Shelley's plant is less explicit than the gendered description in Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* and other eighteenth-century poems on *Mimosa pudica*. Instead, the feminine grace of Darwin's *Mimosa pudica*, which 'feels, alive through all her tender form' (I 305) is metamorphosed by Shelley into the Lady, who tends the garden in the second part with a 'ruling grace' (II 2). The differences between these accounts raise the question as to why Shelley's poem describes the Sensitive-plant as asexual and solitary, departing from traditional depictions of the plant as coyly and provocatively ladylike.

In 'The Sensitive-Plant,' the imagery of love (which the eighteenth-century poets ascribe to the sensitive plant) between men and women is mainly deployed in figures of speech referring to other flowers. Shelley's description of certain flowers obviously evokes sexuality, desire, and love. The names or attributes of flowers such as 'narcissi,' 'Naiad-like,' 'hyacinth,' 'nymph,' and 'Mænad' evoke sensual images from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* ('The Sensitive-Plant,' I 18-34). Alternatively, these enumerative descriptions are akin to a catalogue of flowers, which emphasises Shelley's botanical concerns in the poem (I 13-57). Shelley's poetic style and use of Ovidian personifications coincide exactly with Darwin's own. For instance, Shelley draws on the vocabulary of romance, ranging from 'odour,' 'scent,' and 'passion,' to supply additional ornaments to these flowers (I 15, 22). Among them the stream, 'whose

inconstant bosom / Was pranked [...] / With golden and green light,' signifies both the state of liquid flux and the state of the lovers' capricious minds. This double meaning is further conveyed by the quasi-synaesthetic phrase 'glide and dance / With a motion of sweet sound and radiance' (l. 41-3, 47-8). It implies a kind of free-love among flowers that is suggestive of Shelley's well-known social and political views on the abolition of marital laws.<sup>13</sup> The flowers in the bright sunlight enjoy spring in both a literal and figurative sense, '[I]like young lovers, whom youth and love make dear, / Wrapt and filled by their mutual atmosphere' (l. 68-69). Shelley's rhetoric of the loves of plants other than the Sensitive-plant resembles the sexual representation of *Mimosa pudica* in poems by Smith, Cowper, and Darwin, in contrast to which, Shelley's Sensitive-plant remains 'companionless' (l. 12) but panting 'with bliss' (l. 19) .

### **Romantic Natural Philosophy of Darwin and Shelley**

Shelley's attribution of these feminine and human qualities to the depiction of his Sensitive-plant suggests his awareness of contemporary natural-philosophical debates among the natural-philosophers of the day as to whether plants possess sensibility and volition. Darwin employs the sensitive plant in a series of experiments concerning plant respiration, as is confirmed in his *Philosophical Notes*, a supplement to *The Botanic Garden* which was added to the main text after the second edition (1791). The

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<sup>13</sup> In his letter, 26 November 1811, Shelley writes: 'Marriage is monopolizing, exclusive jealous—the tie which binds it bears the same relation to "friendship in *which excess is lovely*" that the body doth to the soul' (LPBS 1: 194). See also Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Essay on Marriage,' SP 215-16 and *Epipsychidion* 149-59.

biographical fact that the young Shelley, who devoted himself to natural philosophy, was a careful reader of Darwin's volume corroborates the speculation that Shelley's botanical description of the sensitive plant was influenced not only by Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*, but also by its supplementary notes on his experiments with the sensitive plant.

In his notes to *The Botanic Garden*, and elsewhere, Darwin recorded these attentive observations of the sensitive plant concerning its sensory organs and their functions, which included remarks about plants' sensation and volition. From his plant tests using *Mimosa pudica*, Darwin offered a new hypothesis about the 'irritability' of plants and the 'sensibility' which verifies their voluntary action, for instance, sleep:

The irritability of plants is abundantly evinced by the absorption and pulmonary circulation of their juices; their sensibility is shewn by the approaches of the males to the females, and of the females to the males in numerous instances; and, as the essential circumstance of sleep consists in the temporary abolition of voluntary power alone, the sleep of plants evinces that they possess voluntary power; which also indisputably appears in many of them by closing their petals or their leaves during cold, or rain, or darkness, or from mechanic violence. (IV xiv 538n)

This passage shows that Darwin employs particular medical terms such as 'irritability,' 'sensibility,' and 'voluntary power,' all of which are building on eighteenth-century medical discourse. The pair of 'irritability' and 'sensibility' had been used by eighteenth-century physiologists since Albrecht von Haller.<sup>14</sup> Following this tradition,

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<sup>14</sup> For a compact summary of the eighteenth-century physiological debates concerning the definition of irritability and sensibility including vitalism, see Richards, 'Chapter 9, Appendix' 313-21.

Darwin, in *Zoonomia; Or, the Laws of Organic Life* (1794-96), defines ‘the sensorium’ as consisting of four faculties that operate the movement of the ‘muscles or organs of sense’ and ‘the fibrous contractions’ in the body—‘irritability,’ ‘sensibility,’ ‘voluntarity,’ and ‘associability’ (1:32-35)<sup>15</sup> Darwin distinguished ‘sensibility’ from ‘irritability’ in the sense that the former means sensation which entails pain or pleasure, whereas the latter is involuntary action or motion engaged merely with ‘appulses of external bodies’.<sup>16</sup> Later in *The Temple of Nature*, Darwin succinctly articulates the functional differences between sensation, volition, and association in the following lines:

Next the long nerves unite their silver train,  
And young SENSATION permeates the brain;  
Through each new sense the keen emotions dart,  
Flush the young cheek, and swell the throbbing heart.  
From pain and pleasure quick VOLITIONS rise,  
Lift the strong arm, or point the inquiring eyes;  
With Reason’s light bewilder’d Man direct,  
And right and wrong with balance nice detect.  
Last in thick swarms ASSOCIATIONS spring,  
Thoughts join to thoughts, to motions motions cling;  
Whence in long trains of catenation flow  
Imagined joy, and voluntary woe. (I 269-80)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Here ‘the fibrous contractions’ imply the workings of nerves, muscles, and other filaments in the body. The *OED* defines the word ‘fibre’ as follows: ‘One of a number of thread-like bodies or filaments, that enter into the composition of animal (muscular, nervous, etc.) and vegetable tissue’ (n 2). See also Rousseau, ‘Nerves, Spirits, and Fibres’ 160-84.

<sup>16</sup> For Darwin, ‘voluntarity’ is related to ‘desire or aversion’ rather than pleasure or pain alone (*Zoonomia* 1:35).

<sup>17</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature, or The Origin of Society*, ed. Martin Priestman, October, 2006, *Romantic Circles Electronic Editions*, 22 Nov. 2010 <[http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/darwin\\_temple/](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/darwin_temple/)>. Shelley uses a similar phrase also in *Queen Mab*: ‘Making the earth a slaughter-house’ (VII 48).

Although these explanations are accurate even in modern physiological terms, Darwin goes further by introducing these technical terms into his plant-experiments in order to assimilate plant and animal organisms under a single term. In *Zoonomia*, Darwin explores the relational functions of the sensory organs of plants by analogy with the animal body (1:104-07). In this sense, when reading Darwin's observation on the voluntary power of plants, it is particularly significant to keep in mind Darwin's differentiation between 'irritability' (involuntary action) and 'sensibility' (voluntary action) as written in *Zoonomia* (1:33).

To confirm the existence of voluntary action in the plant's body, Darwin pays attention to the respiratory function in its organs. In *The Economy of Vegetation*, Darwin metaphorically configures the system of plant respiration in his time, now known as photosynthesis: '[Sylphs's] playful hands [...] wed the enamour'd OXYGENE to LIGHT' (IV ii 34). Darwin's metaphor for photosynthesis is derived from other plant respiratory experiments by other contemporary natural philosophers such as Joseph Priestley and Antoine Lavoisier (VI. ii. 34n). A further explanatory account of photosynthesis is in one of the 'Additional Notes' to *The Economy of Vegetation*, entitled 'Vegetable Respiration': 'It is hence evident, that [...] plants gave out vital air when the sun shone upon them' (116). Such a respiratory power common to animals is, according to Darwin, particularly evident in the sensitive plant:

Many vegetables during the night do not seem to respire, but to sleep like the dormant animals and insects in water. This appears from the mimosa and many other plants closing the upper sides of their leaves together in their

sleep, and thus precluding that side of them from both light and air. And from many flowers closing up the polished or interior side of their petals, which we have also endeavoured to shew to be a respiratory organ.

(*The Economy of Vegetation* IV xiv 538n)

The proof of the respiration of ‘the mimosa,’ as well as its sleep, sustains Darwin’s argument that plants have their own sensation and will. The sensibility of plants, for Darwin, connotes the voluntary function of sexual ‘approaches’ and ‘sleeping’ as do Shelley’s plants in the garden of ‘The Sensitive-Plant.’ The reaction of the sensitive plant endorses the idea that plants possess a mind and breathe as do other animals and that sunlight and air are essential for them to do so. Darwin, in this manner, popularises the process of photosynthesis from the hypothesis that the sensitive plant has ‘sensibility’ and ‘volition.’<sup>18</sup>

Yet Darwin’s argument is not always built on a consensus of biological opinion in his time. Darwin’s observation that plants have ‘voluntary power’ was, for instance, refuted by Scottish and French natural philosophers, including William Smellie and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck. Smellie was the general editor for the scientific field of the third edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1797), in which an anonymous author (possibly Smellie) of an article entitled ‘Sensitive Plant’ denies Darwin’s theory as being built on ‘the source of wild conjuncture and not of sound philosophy’ on account of the difference in structure between ‘the fibres of plants and the muscles of

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<sup>18</sup> For Darwin as a populariser of photosynthesis theory, see Haward A. Gest, ‘A “Misplaced Chapter” in the History of Photosynthesis Research; the Second Publication (1796) on Plant Processes by Dr. Jan Ingen-Housz, MD, Discoverer of Photosynthesis,’ *Photosynthesis Research* 53 (1997): 71; and Desmond King-Hele, ‘The Air Man,’ *The Genius of Erasmus Darwin*, ed C. U. M. Smith and Robert Arnott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 18.

animals.’<sup>19</sup> Several years after the anonymous article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Lamarck employs the sensitive plant in his *Philosophie Zoologique* ([*Zoological Philosophy*] 1809) to categorise and define animals and plants; what distinguishes animals from plants is, for Lamarck, that animals possess their own voluntary ‘will’ (*‘volonté’*) and ‘true irritability’ (*‘irritabilité réelle’*), which, by contrast to Darwin’s hypothesis, differs from the sensitive plant’s reaction attributed to its elastic fluid.<sup>20</sup> In opposition to these views, Darwin’s botanical hypothesis, based on the idea that plants possess their own volition, is less well-grounded in the material. Although there were arguments for and against the ‘voluntary power’ of plants, Darwin’s experiments were fundamental in developing the botanical or biological fields of plant-respiratory studies.<sup>21</sup> Darwin’s hypothesis serves better to explain Romantic poetry rather than natural philosophy at that time. Darwin’s concept of plant-sensibility reinforces the affinity between Darwin’s *Philosophical Notes* and Shelley’s poem which depicts the sensitive plant as possessing these corresponding characteristics.

Viewed through Darwin’s botanical notes and his biological ideas, Shelley’s ‘The Sensitive-Plant’ exceeds a mere figure or pathetic fallacy so as to reveal a Romantic version of natural philosophy:

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<sup>19</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 3rd ed., vol. 17 (Edinburgh, 1797) 155.

<sup>20</sup> J. B. P. A. Lamarck, *Zoological Philosophy: An Exposition with Regard to the Natural History of Animals*, trans. Hugh Elliot (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 52-3, trans. of J. B. P. A. Lamarck, *Philosophie Zoologique* (Weinheim: Engelmann, 1960) 94-96.

<sup>21</sup> Smellie in *The Philosophy of Natural History* (1790), admitted that all ‘living beings’ on earth ‘are not only conscious of their existence, but enjoy degrees of happiness proportioned to their natures, and the purposes they are destined to answer in the general scale of animation.’ Smellie’s idea is, in its very essence, not too far from Darwin’s. William Smellie, *The Philosophy of Natural History*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1790) 77. See also Ritterbush, 152.



But the Sensitive-plant, which could give small fruit  
Of the love which it felt from the leaf to the root,  
Received more than all—it loved more than ever,  
Where none wanted but it, could belong to the giver.

For the Sensitive-Plant has no bright flower;  
Radiance and odour are not its dower—  
It loves—even like Love—its deep heart is full—  
It desires what it has not—the beautiful! (I. 70-77)

It is clear that these lines allude to the dialogue between Socrates and Diotima in the *Symposium* or *The Banquet* (Shelley's own translation), in which Love, 'the child of Poverty and Plenty' is 'the follower and servant of Venus, because he was conceived at her birth, and because by nature he is a lover of all that is beautiful and Venus was beautiful' (*The Banquet* 442).<sup>22</sup> In this respect, Shelley's Sensitive-plant is 'Love' (and 'Venus' is manifested in the figure of a woman called 'Lady,' a protagonist in the next Part of this poem). However, this apparently Platonic passage on love is even more suggestive, when read through the lens of Darwin's note on plant respiration.<sup>23</sup> Shelley's Sensitive-plant receives love and reproduces it by itself, as if it appeared to be breathing. The image of this plant respiring and providing love in the blissful sunlight coincides, in botanical terms, with the function of photosynthesis which plants perform to produce oxygen. This process, in fact, resonates with Darwin's earlier wedding-trope of 'the enamour'd OXYGENE to LIGHT.' In these photosynthetic terms, the function of the 'OXYGENE' can be analogous to 'the love' (71) produced by the Sensitive-plant,

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<sup>22</sup> See also *POS* 3:301n76-77.

<sup>23</sup> See also Plato, *The Banquet*, Notopoulos, 440.

‘the giver’ (74). For both Shelley and Darwin, oxygen is closely associated with love.

In this way, a combination of Platonic philosophy and natural philosophy offers the following interpretation. The Sensitive-plant gives forth not physical or sexual love, but ‘the love’ for the ‘beautiful’ (77). The Sensitive-plant is able to yield love in itself instead of its ‘fruit[s]’ (70) or ‘bright flower[s]’ (75) as ‘Radiance and odour are not its dower’ (76). The speaker says that the Sensitive-plant ‘loved more than ever / Where none wanted but it, could belong to the giver.’ In this manner, the process of the Sensitive-plant’s love-production exhibits the same mechanism as photosynthesis. As the Sensitive-plant is equivalent to this personified ‘Love,’ so the oxygen it produces is identical to ‘love.’ Furthermore, ‘the light’ to which the Sensitive-plant opens its leaves has echoes of the plant’s longing for ‘the beautiful’ at the outset of the poem, precisely because light is often linked with ‘the beautiful’ in the Platonic tradition. (I 3).<sup>24</sup> Re-considering this Platonic trope for the Sensitive-plant in relation to the process of photosynthesis illustrates that the Sensitive-plant sympathetically receives and produces the light of beauty and the sunlight. This love is, consequently, at a remove from the reproductive sexual love between men and women, as in Darwin’s *Mimosa*

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<sup>24</sup> For (Neo-)Platonic or Idealistic readings of ‘The Sensitive-Plant,’ see Carl Grabo, *The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley’s Thought* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1936) 283-84; Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, 265-9; Wasserman, *Shelley*, 241-84. With reference to other readings differing from this Platonic reading, Harold Bloom undertakes a mythopoetic reading in comparison to Edmund Spenser’s ‘Muiopotomos’ (1590) and William Blake’s ‘The Book of Thel’ (1789 [-1793]). Harold Bloom, *Shelley’s Mythmaking* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1959) 148-64. Richard S. Caldwell reads the poem psychoanalytically (mainly through Freud). Richard S. Caldwell, “‘The Sensitive Plant’ as Original Fantasy,” *Studies in Romanticism* 15 (1976): 221-52. O’Neill argues that the poem’s conclusion should be understood ironically. See Michael O’Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-Couscous Poem* 176-79. For an anti-Platonic reading of the oneness in the poem, see Hogle, *Shelley’s Process* 286-94.

*pudica*, and much closer to the mutual and nutritional love of the individual (subject) towards a nurturing world (object) described in Darwin's process of respiration and photosynthesis.

### **The Respiration of Love and the Circular Economy of Nature**

For Shelley, the Sensitive-plant's photosynthesis represents both an ideal and natural process. This is also evident in a further possible scientific source for Shelley's idea of an organically united world which incorporates the function of his Sensitive-plant as a provider of oxygen through photosynthesis. Shelley may have acquired the knowledge of photosynthesis by reading the writings of Humphry Davy in conjunction with Darwin. Shelley took notes on photosynthesis from Davy's *Elements of Agricultural Chemistry* (1813) as he was composing 'The Sensitive-Plant.' The word 'mine-lamps' in this poem, for instance, proves his knowledge of Davy's natural philosophy (l. 63).<sup>25</sup> Shelley's note on natural circulation suggests that plants, through photosynthesis, give off oxygen which is to be consumed by animals:

15 [.....] Plant decom  
16 carbonic acid  
17 a pose the ~~oxygene~~ gas of the atmosphere  
18 absorb & convert the carbon, & in  
19 the same proportion give forth oxygen  
20 carbonic acid gass produced by ferment  
21 ation [&] combination & respiration can  
22 only be consumed by plants which

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<sup>25</sup> For more information about this mine lamp, see Holmes, *The Age of Wonder* 337-80.

1 e[xude] in the same proportion oxygen .  
 2 ~~Animals~~ From the progress or the  
 3 waste of animal life a principle necessary  
 4 to the existence of vegetables is produced ,  
 5 & from the functions of vegetable  
 6 existence , ~~animals~~ desire a supply of  
 7 th[eir]e substance indispensable to their  
 8 life. An exchange is made between  
 9 carbonic acid gass & oxygene gas;  
 10 the former the result of the destruction  
 11 of the principle of life & the latter  
 12 the fuel by which it is nourished.  
 13 16 -  
 14 Plants consist chiefly of carbon &  
 15 gasses. Manures contain these  
 16 principles. Their combination forms the  
 17 result. (170rev., 171rev.)<sup>26</sup>

This quotation explains the circulating system of nature in which animals and plants support each other's lives through the operation of photosynthesis involving an 'exchange' between 'carbonic acid gass & oxygene gas.' In other words, plants absorb and decompose carbon dioxide emitted by animals and produce oxygen for them, just as animals emit gases again in this endlessly cyclical process, so that vegetable life clearly plays a fundamental part in this cycle. Shelley's note also contains a brief summary of one process of photosynthesis: 'Light [is] necessary to the health of plants' (346 [167rev.]). Photosynthesis by plants is the foundation of this organic circulation in

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<sup>26</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Witch of Atlas Notebook: Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 6*, ed. and intro. Carlene A. Adamson, (New York: Garland, 1997) 354, 352, vol. 5 of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*. See also Webb, *Shelley* 236-37.

Shelley's notebook. This imagery of photosynthesis also indicates a circulating movement which is vital in the last stanzas of the first part of 'The Sensitive-Plant.' Such a cyclical motion is not unique to 'The Sensitive-Plant,' since a similar account of Nature's circulation system is also found in Shelley's other poems written around 1820. Carlene A. Adamson, one of the editors of Shelley's Bodleian manuscript collection, points out that this note on the circulatory system from *The Elements of Agricultural Chemistry* is a cornerstone of another lyric poem, 'The Cloud' (1820).<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Sharon Ruston's *Shelley and Vitality* links this note on Davy's work to Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*.<sup>28</sup> Both comments on the organic circulation in the system of Nature provide an equally fascinating insight into Shelley's 'The Sensitive-Plant.'

In the case of 'The Sensitive-Plant,' what differentiates this poem from the other poems of the same period is its emphasis on the atmospheric general circulation on earth, implied by means of Paracelsus's theory (or its original source, the ancient Greek concept) of the four elements: earth, air, water, and fire. This elemental trope shows another affinity with Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*, where he employs the old four elements through 'the Rosicrucian doctrine of Gnomes [earth], Sylphs [air], Nymphs [water], and Salamanders [fire],' which is also closely related to Paracelsus.<sup>29</sup> Davy

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<sup>27</sup> Carlene A. Adamson, Introduction, *The Witch of Atlas Notebook*, Adamson xlvii. See also Shelley's other poems such as 'The Witch of Atlas' 305-12, and 'Zucca' (1822) 33-64.

<sup>28</sup> This is a useful work of reference in terms of the organic system of nature in Shelley's poetry. Although Ruston's approach is similar, my point of view, however, differs from hers in its focus on the key concept of photosynthesis of *Mimosa pudica* (*Shelley and Vitality* 95-103).

<sup>29</sup> Darwin, Apology to *The Botanic Garden*, viii; see also Darwin, *The Economy of Vegetation*, I. 73n. As a matter of fact, a letter written by the youthful Shelley verifies his knowledge of Paracelsus: 'I [...] read *romances* & those the most marvellous ones unremittingly, & pored over the reveries of Albertus Magnus & Paracelsus' (*LPBS* 1: 303). In this period, Shelley wrote also a gothic novel entitled *St Irvyne; Or the Rosicrucian: A Romance* (1810), in which Ginotti,

rejects this supernatural interpretation of nature in the economy of plants:

To give the argument in plainer language, there are few philosophers who would be inclined to assert the existence of any thing above common matter, any thing immaterial in the vegetable œconomy. Such a doctrine is worthy of a poetic form. The imagination may easily give Dryads to our trees, and Sylphs can be admitted in vegetable physiology; and for reasons nearly as strong, irritability and animation ought to be excluded.<sup>30</sup>

Shelley, in fact, conflates what Davy calls ‘poetic form’ with Davy’s exploration of ‘the vegetable œconomy,’ by describing the plants through the imagery of the four elements and the emotive tropes in the end of ‘Part First’ of ‘The Sensitive-Plant.’ Shelley first employs two elements, the imagery of fire and water. The speaker of ‘The Sensitive-Plant’ relates:

The unseen clouds of the dew, which lie  
Like fire in the flowers till the Sun rides high,  
Then wander like spirits among the spheres,  
Each cloud faint with the fragrance it bears;

The quivering vapours of dim noontide,  
Which like a sea o’er the warm earth glide,  
In which every sound, and odour, and beam  
Move, as reeds in a single stream [...]. (l. 86-93)

The ‘fire in the flowers’ (87) indicates one of the four elements as well as the images of the ‘vapours of dim noontide’ (90) and ‘a sea o’er the warm earth’ (91) which convey the element of Water and Earth. The gliding vapours are depicted as waves of the ‘sea’ (91), which are associated with the imagery of moving tides on the shore created by the

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an alchemist and a member of the Rosicrucian Order, seeks for the secret of immortal life.

<sup>30</sup> Humphry Davy, *Elements of Agricultural Chemistry*, ed. John Shier, new ed. (London, 1846) 187.

rhyme of 'glide' (91) and 'noontide'(90). This movement of the waves and 'reeds' (93) emulating a stream is also suggestive of the ways in which the chain of the four elements is continued in the poem:

And when evening descended from Heaven above,  
And the Earth was all rest, and the Air was all love;  
And delight, though less bright, was far more deep,  
And the day's veil fell from the world of sleep,

And the beasts, and the birds, and the insects were drowned  
In an ocean of dreams without a sound  
Whose waves never mark, though they ever impress  
The light sand which paves it—Consciousness. (I.98-105)

Here the capitalised 'Earth' (99) and 'Air' (99) illuminate the poet's awareness of the four elements. With regard to the relationship among these elements, 'the Air was all love' (99), the 'delight' (100) of which introduces the 'ocean of dreams' (103) into a world permeated with love. Echoing Shelley's note on Davy's circulating principle of life, these lines depict the cyclical system of the air and water with their shifting focus—starting from 'the cloud of the dew' (86) to 'the sea,' 'the sea' to 'the Earth,' 'the Earth' to 'the Air,' and 'the Air' finally is infused into the 'ocean of dreams,' whose 'waves' never disturb—leave no trace on—the 'Consciousness' of all living things. This organic circulation of oxygen and water is assimilated into tidal imagery: 'every sound, and odour, and beam / Move, as reeds in a single stream' (I. 92-3). Through a synaesthetic effect, this whole phrase is harmonised into one movement.

At the centre of this circulating system is the Sensitive-plant, whose love,

produced in the afternoon by its respiration and photosynthesis, sustains harmony through the world in the evening, and so serves one of the most important functions in this world. The Sensitive-plant, in the final stanza, falls asleep:

The Sensitive-plant was the earliest  
Upgathered into the bosom of rest;  
A sweet child weary of its delight,  
The feeblest and yet the favourite—  
Cradled within the embrace of night. (I. 110-4)

Having been filled with love, the Sensitive-plant is '[c]radled within the embrace of night,' as children are by their mothers 'into the bosom of rest.' During the night, it rests and stops breathing or panting in delight; which corresponds with Darwin's detailed observation as cited previously. Shelley's Sensitive-plant, the most sentient being in the world, is not only what Maniquis regards as a symbolic figure of sensibility common to all life, but, beyond the pathetic fallacy, a scientific representation based on the writings by Darwin and Davy. In this sense, Shelley's description is closer to the natural philosophy of Darwin and Davy than to William Wordsworth's pantheistic generalisation in 'Lines Written in Early Spring' (1798), when 'every flower / Enjoys the air it breathes' (11-2).<sup>31</sup> The circulating harmony of nature in Shelley's poem rooted in the notes from Davy also embodies Shelley's attempt to synthesise aesthetic (figural) and scientific (literal) aspects in poetry.

Reading the imagery of 'The Sensitive-Plant' through the lens of Darwin's notes on his observation of plant respiration and Shelley's own notes on Davy, reveals how

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<sup>31</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written in Early Spring,' *The Major Works*, 80.



different discourses of botany, chemistry, and Platonism are interwoven into this poem. Shelley interlaces natural philosophy with moral philosophy (the counterpart of natural philosophy, including metaphysics and psychology) in a unique way. This text reflects a specific natural-moral philosophical discourse, in which the Sensitive-plant possesses sensibility and volition, thereby blurring the distinction between plant and animal. The function of the Sensitive-plant, in this discourse, shifts away from the image of *Mimosa pudica*, the reserved lady, to the process of biology central to plant and animal respiration. The second and third parts of 'The Sensitive-Plant' further develop this circulatory image of plant respiration and photosynthesis into a larger economy of nature. In this context, the twilight scene at the end of the first part, when 'the Air was all love, / And delight, though less bright, was far more deep' enables us to understand that the 'delight' increases in proportion to the amount of love, which the Sensitive-plant seems to release. The Sensitive-plant, which gives forth love and delight at the centre of the universe, becomes an icon of this organic world filled with the happiness of all living things. There is a particular sympathy or synergy between Shelley's Sensitive-plant and the world, which is to be more fully described in the next part of the poem.

## **2. 'Organic Happiness' and the System of Nature in 'The Sensitive-Plant'**

### **Touching the Heart: The Effect of Sympathy and 'Organic Happiness'**

The second part of 'The Sensitive-Plant' exhibits the relationship between the botanic

garden and its iconic gardener, a ‘Lady,’ who plays a significant role as a mother or goddess of all the plants, by maintaining harmony within the garden’s ecosystem through her sympathy (as a branch of sensibility). This idea of sympathy is essential to interpreting the depiction of the Lady in ‘The Sensitive-Plant.’ Like the Sensitive-plant in the first part, the Lady as a gardener is the protagonist in the second part. Both of them, through sensibility and sympathy, act as a catalyst (an intermediate agent) which is able to bring beautiful harmony to the world. Yet the Lady is represented as closer to the source of the harmony than the Sensitive-plant:

A Lady—the wonder of her kind,  
Whose form was upborne by a lovely mind  
[.....]  
Tended the garden from morn to even:  
And the meteors of that sublunar Heaven  
Like the lamps of the air when night walks forth,  
Laughed round her footsteps up from the Earth. (II 5-6, 9-12)

The portrayal of this amazing Lady, ‘[w]hose form was upborne by a lovely mind’ (6), implies a dichotomy of form and mind (soul). All of the Lady’s ‘lovely mind’ (6), the ‘meteors,’ and the ‘lamps of air’ (11) are echoes of one another, floating between Heaven and Earth. Most importantly, the Lady’s presence engenders a harmonious atmosphere in the garden:

I doubt not the flowers of that garden sweet  
Rejoiced in the sound of her gentle feet;  
I doubt not they felt the spirit that came  
From her glowing fingers through all their frame.

She sprinkled bright water from the stream  
 On those that were faint with the sunny beam;  
 And out of the cups of the heavy flowers  
 She emptied the rain of the thunder showers. (II 29-36)

All flowers touched by the Lady feel pleasure and her 'spirit' (31), which is mediated through her 'glowing fingers' (32) in order to nourish them. The Lady's 'spirit' as the content of her 'frame' (32) as material body is associated with the immaterial image of light and liquid. Beginning as a 'Power' (1) of the garden in the Part Second, the Lady's lightness is echoed in the 'meteors' and 'lamps' and her liquidity eventually becomes the 'sprinkled bright water' (33) distributed by the Lady, through which her spiritual emanation fills the garden with sympathy:

Her step seemed to pity the grass it prest;  
 You might hear by the heaving of her breast,  
 That the coming and going of the wind  
 Brought pleasure there and left passion behind [...]. (II 21-24)

All over the garden, the plants and other lives touched by the Lady's sympathetic fingers and even 'steps' (21), are imbued with 'pleasure' (24) and 'passion' (24), conveyed by the Lady's breath—that is, *spiritus* or *pneuma*—as 'the wind' (23) inspired and expired from 'the heaving of her breast' (22).<sup>32</sup> The Lady is depicted not only as an 'Eve in this Eden' (II 2), but as a variation of Urania in the Garden of Adonis, 'her Paradise' (*Adonais* 14).<sup>33</sup> Through her touch all the creatures can feel the 'spirit'

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<sup>32</sup> The relationship between touch and sympathy in eighteenth-century literary and medical discourses, see Van Sant, 83.

<sup>33</sup> As Wasserman points out, this conception of the Lady in the garden derived from Spenser's version of the Garden of Adonis and Venus (Urania) in Book III Canto iv of *The Faerie Queene* (Stanza 39-54; *The Subtler Language* 253). Wasserman goes on to say that 'even Milton pointed to the similarity of his Eden to the traditional conceptions of the gardens of Adonis and

or 'Power' of the garden.

This harmonious relationship between the Lady and all the living things in the garden is based on the concept of sympathy in eighteenth-century medical and psychological discourses in Britain. For example, physiologists in Edinburgh, such as Robert Whytt, William Cullen, Seguin Henry Jackson and so on, considered sympathy as an effect of sensibility that links the physical brain with the mind to produce imagination.<sup>34</sup> In *The Temple of Nature*, which is permeated with the knowledge discovered with the natural philosophy of his time, Erasmus Darwin has Urania—his Muse and the narrator of the poem—introduce the function of human sympathy. Like Shelley's 'Lady,' Urania celebrates 'SYMPATHY' (III 467) as an angel 'Seraph' that has special power to warm a human 'cold heart' (469) with another, and to '[b]ind sex to sex, and mingle soul to soul' (482), so that it 'charms the world with universal love [...] / And gives Society to savage man' (478, 484).

Yet the Lady suddenly dies at the end of summer and can no longer maintain harmony in the garden. Its decay into a ruinous state becomes the main focus of the third part.<sup>35</sup> Here again the Sensitive-plant becomes the measure of the garden's mood.

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Alcinous' (*The Subtler Language* 253n1). This imagery of the Uranian lady in paradise is to be transferred into the imagery of Emily and the utopian isle in *Epipsychidion*.

<sup>34</sup> See Evelyn L. Forget, 'Evocations of Sympathy: Sympathetic Imagery in Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Physiology,' *History of Political Economy* 35, Annual Supplement (2003): 289-95.

<sup>35</sup> As Wasserman and Lisbeth Chapin comment, the Lady's interaction with other creatures, in particular butterflies—the butterfly is often seen as the symbol of the soul as when Psyche is represented as butterfly-winged—anticipates her own death. See Wasserman, *Shelley* 176; and Lisbeth Chapin, 'Shelley's Great Chain of Being: From "Blind Worms" to "New-Fledged Eagles,"' *Humans and Other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*, ed. Frank Palmeri (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) 161-62.

Sympathy, once mediating happiness and delight in the garden, now changes into a catalyst of mourning and sadness throughout the garden: 'the Sensitive-plant / Felt the sound of the funeral chant' for the Lady (III 5-6). Shelley's mournful lines read:

The garden once fair became cold and foul  
Like the corpse of her who had been its soul  
Which at first was lovely as if in sleep,  
Then slowly changed, till it grew a heap  
To make men tremble who never weep. (III 17-21)

Having lost the Lady as the central 'Power' of the plants, their original mother, symbolically, called an 'Eve in this Eden,' the garden decays like a 'corpse' (18) and registers the fearful change that may have befallen the Lady. The Lady's touch, which used to be a source of life in the garden, is now turned into its inverse, namely, some contagious disease that spreads throughout the garden so as to spoil its beauty. In accordance with the Lady's death and the ensuing mood of mourning and grieving, all the beautiful flowers wither, like those 'lilies [which] were drooping, and white, and wan, / Like the head and skin of a dying man' (28-29). In turn, many 'ugly weeds' (39) overgrow and take over the garden (38-117).<sup>36</sup> This gothic depiction also foreshadows the dreadful death of the Sensitive-plant.

After the death of the Lady, the garden becomes entirely desolate through the autumn and winter. The flowers which had been described as 'the [celestial] meteors of that sublunar Heaven' (II 10) are now transformed into base 'unctuous meteors from spray to spray' (III 78). In such a world, the Sensitive-plant cannot help withering away.

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<sup>36</sup> Archibald T. Strong, 'The Sinister in Shelley,' *Three Studies in Shelley and An Essay on Nature in Wordsworth and Meredith* (London: Oxford, 1921) 134-35.

The depiction of its decay highlights its all too acute sympathy with the Lady:

The Sensitive-plant, like one forbid  
Wept, and the tears, within each lid  
Of its folded leaves which together grew,  
Were changed to a blight of frozen glue.

For the leaves soon fell, and the branches soon  
By the heavy axe of the blast were hewn;  
The sap shrank to the root through every pore  
As blood to a heart that will beat no more. (III 82-89)

The Sensitive-plant, which used to tremble with pleasure and give forth love, now is weeping 'tears' (83) instead. Its sap as 'tears' turns into a deadly 'blight of frozen glue' (85), whereby the image of liquid changes from tears into 'blood' (89).<sup>37</sup> This personification of the Sensitive-plant further enhances the effect of physical pain and cruelty. There is an echo of bloody executions in the metaphor of 'the heavy axe of the blast' (87), and the plant, its sap drying up, resembles a blood-drained body. From a botanical perspective, Shelley's Sensitive-plant is dying from a debilitating blight, which is caused by its own tear-like sap. Shelley portrays this plant as withering away and dying of its excessive sympathy for the dead Lady and devastated garden.

This portrayal of the Sensitive-plant is not a mere pathetic fallacy. Interestingly, this situation of the Sensitive-plant and the devastated garden reflects

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<sup>37</sup> The word 'blight' caused by the agony of loss pervasive throughout the garden reminds us of a passage from Shelley's *An Address to the People on The Death of the Princess Charlotte* (1817), wherein Shelley states: 'How many women die in childbed and leave their families of motherless children and their husbands to live on, blighted by the remembrance of that heavy loss?' Percy Bysshe Shelley, *An Address to the People on The Death of the Princess Charlotte*, PWPBS, 1: 231.

eighteenth-century warnings against excessive sensibility, and here again, Erasmus Darwin plays an important part. As a parallel to 'The Sensitive-Plant,' Darwin's *The Temple of Nature* shows excessive sympathy affecting mental well-being. By calling the harsh world in which weaker living things are prey to the stronger in what are now called 'food chains' by ecologists, the 'one great Slaughter-house' (IV. 66), Urania speaks of so many unhappy creatures on earth and sympathetically laments the mutability of sublunary life:

AND now, e'en I, whose verse reluctant sings  
The changeful state of sublunary things,  
Bend o'er Mortality with silent sighs,  
And wipe the secret tear-drops from my eyes,  
Hear through the night one universal groan,  
And mourn unseen for evils not my own,  
With restless limbs and throbbing heart complain,  
Stretch'd on the rack of sentimental pain!

—Ah where can Sympathy reflecting find  
One bright idea to console the mind? (IV 123-32)

As the Muse sings of the vicissitudes of life, she cannot stop her tears flowing, in empathy with physical 'sublunary' pain. Like Shelley's Sensitive-plant, the Muse's tears are proof of a deep and strong sensibility. Moreover, Darwin's lines suggest that the Muse's excessive sympathy is transformed from 'sentimental pain' (130) to corporeal pain coursing through her 'restless limbs and throbbing heart' (129). Darwin, in his own footnote, warns the reader further against this excessive sensibility as 'sympathizing with too great sensibility' with others' misfortunes destroys one's own

happiness and then leads to a decrease of ‘the sum total of public happiness’:

Children should be taught in their early education to feel for all the remediable evils, which they observe in others; but they should at the same time be taught sufficient firmness of mind not intirely to destroy their own happiness by their sympathizing with too great sensibility with the numerous irremediable evils, which exist in the present system of the world: as by indulging that kind of melancholy they decrease the sum total of public happiness; which is so far rather reprehensible than commendable.

(IV 130n)

Darwin’s warning about excessive sensibility is reflected in Shelley’s withered Sensitive-plant—which was, indeed, depicted as a ‘sweet child’ (I 112)—due to that tear-like blight. This connection between Darwin and Shelley concerning excessive sensibility opens up another dimension of Shelley’s poetic economy of Nature indebted to what Darwin calls ‘the sum total of public happiness.’

Such an idea concerning sympathy and ‘organic happiness’ derives from the political philosophies of Darwin’s contemporaries, such as Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham, but Darwin goes even further. In a footnote to *The Temple of Nature*, Darwin remarks that the proper use of sensibility increases total happiness on earth, using the phrase ‘organic happiness’:

The reader is referred to a few pages on this subject in *Phytologia* (1800), Sect. XIX. 7. 1, where the felicity of organic life is considered more at large; but it is probable that the most certain way to estimate the happiness and misery of organic beings; as it depends on the actions of the organs of sense, which constitute ideas; or of the muscular fibres which perform locomotion; would be to consider those actions, as they are produced or excited by the four sensorial powers of irritation, sensation, volition, and association. A



small volume on this subject by some ingenious writer, might not only amuse, as an object of curiosity; but by showing the world the immediate sources of their pains and pleasures might teach the means to avoid the one, and to procure the other, and thus contribute both ways to increase the sum total of organic happiness. (IV 450n)<sup>38</sup>

In order to ‘estimate the happiness and misery of organic beings,’ human beings can operate through the actions of the mind and the body, or muscular fibres. Through this psycho-physiological act, consisting of the four sensory powers (irritation, sensation, volition and association), all animals and even plants can feel both pleasure and pain. Equally, ‘the four sensorial powers’ are requisite to sense the happiness of ‘organic beings.’

In this organic chain, the death of every living thing forms part of a larger cycle of life. Darwin employs the example of war victims in *Phytologia* mentioned above:

the quantity of organized matter, of which they [the bodies of the soldiers] were composed, presently revives in the forms of millions of microscopic animals, vegetables, and insects, and afterwards of quadrupeds and men; the sum of whole happiness is perhaps much greater than that of the harassed soldiers, by whose destruction they have gained their existence!—Is not this a consoling idea to a mind of universal sympathy?

(*Phytologia* 558)

Darwin even narrows down his focus on the world to the level of ‘the forms of millions of microscopic animals,’ which eat and decompose the dead bodies and decompose the ‘misery of organic beings.’ This undoubtedly suggests a modern

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<sup>38</sup> Darwin repeats this point in the section on ‘Happiness of Organized Nature’ of *Phytologia*. Erasmus Darwin, *Phytologia; Or the Philosophy of Agriculture and Gardening. With the Theory of Draining Morasses, and with an Improved Construction of the Drill Plough* (London, 1800) 556. See also King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* 25.

ecological idea of food chains and Darwin finds a consolation in the increase of ‘the sum total of public happiness.’ This is what Darwin calls ‘a mind of universal sympathy,’ thorough the power of sensation and imagination.

### **Darwin’s ‘Organic Happiness’ and Shelley’s Circulatory Pleasure on Earth**

In this context, the depiction of the Sensitive-plant’s death as caused by its excessive sympathy for the death of the Lady—also mirrors Darwin’s concept of Nature’s economy based on the concept of ‘organic happiness.’ The last part of ‘The Sensitive-Plant’ attests to this point. At the end of ‘Part Third,’ even after spring returns, the Sensitive-plant is not reborn, but replaced with other sinister weeds and fungi:

When winter had gone and spring came back  
The Sensitive-plant was a leafless wreck;  
But the mandrakes and toadstools and docks and darnels  
Rose like the dead from their ruined charnels. (III 114-7)

Hope for future regeneration is, strangely, suspended here. The Sensitive-plant still remains dead surrounded by grotesque weeds that spread across the garden. Unlike in *Prometheus Unbound* or ‘Ode to the West Wind’ in these lines of ‘The Sensitive-Plant,’ there seems no possible hope of rejuvenation.<sup>39</sup> *Adonais* admits a moment of hopelessness similar to Section III of ‘The Sensitive-Plant’:

—We decay  
Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief  
Convulse us and consume us day by day,

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<sup>39</sup> Webb regards ‘The Sensitive-Plant’ as ‘a nightmare version’ of the ‘Ode to the West Wind’ (Shelley 238).

And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay. (348-51)<sup>40</sup>

The speaker seems to be possessed by ‘fear and grief’ (349) which freeze his ‘hopes’(351) in similes of ‘corpses in a charnel’ (349) and ‘worms’(351) reminiscent of the decomposition of the dead Lady and the Sensitive-plant taken over by poisonous and sinister-looking plants, such as ‘mandrakes and toadstools and docks and darnels [that] / Rose like the dead from their ruined charnels’ (III 116-17).

Despite this apparent bad ending, there remains a sense of hope in the ‘Conclusion’ of Shelley’s ‘The Sensitive-Plant,’ which foregrounds the binary oppositions between the physical and the metaphysical, life and death, and the spiritual and material:

Whether the Sensitive-plant, or that  
Which within its boughs like a spirit sat  
Ere its outward form had known decay,  
Now felt this change,—I cannot say.

Whether that Lady’s gentle mind,  
No longer with the form combined  
Which scattered love—as stars do light,  
Found sadness, where it left delight,

I dare not guess; but in this life  
Of error, ignorance and strife—  
Where nothing is—but all things seem,  
And we, the shadows of the dream,

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<sup>40</sup> See also Stanza 18 of *Adonais*, although the imagery of lovely creatures renders this stanza happier than the desolate scene of ‘The Sensitive-Plant.’ Wasserman, in *The Subtler Language*, differentiates Shelley’s Garden of the Uranian Lady from Spenser’s Garden of Adonis created by the Uranian-Venus, in the sense that ‘whereas Spenser distinguished between the eternal Garden and the mortal world it continuously supplies, Shelley has identified the two’ (255). For further information about Shelley’s Uranian-Venus, see Chapter VI of this thesis.

It is a modest creed, and yet  
Pleasant if one considers it,  
To own that death itself must be,  
Like all the rest,—a mockery.

That Garden sweet, that lady fair,  
And all sweet shapes and odours there  
In truth have never past away—  
'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed— not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight  
There is no death nor change: their might  
Exceeds our organs—which endure  
No light—being themselves obscure. (1-24)

In the first two stanzas, the 'spirit' (2) of the Sensitive-plant, as well as the Lady's 'mind' (5), have departed from their 'outward form[s]' (3) in 'this life' (9) on earth. From line 9 onwards, the spiritual or metaphysical is represented as superior to the physical to such an extent that all life on earth becomes but the Platonic 'shadows of the dream' (12). For the narrator, the death of the Sensitive-plant and Lady is just a 'mockery' (16). The beautiful garden and Lady have not really 'past away' (19), but they appear to have done so, precisely because the human sensory organs are no longer able to perceive 'love, and beauty, and delight' (21), which are obscured from us, as we are told: "'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed— not they' (20). The words '[i]n truth' (19) mark a stark contrast with the word 'mockery.' This contrast also distinguishes the power of 'love, and beauty, and delight' (connected to 'light') from sensory perception in the sense that the human 'organs' remain 'obscure' (because they cannot perceive

the light) and are, simultaneously, blinded by an excessively intense 'light.'<sup>41</sup> In addition, the grammatical complexity of the last three lines makes more obscure the relationship between the physical and metaphysical in Shelley's cryptic 'Conclusion.'

However, these lines should not be passed over as a mere reflection of Shelley's understanding of (Neo)Platonic or other metaphysical thoughts. Rather, this conclusion may also imply some invisible but physical principles hidden in Nature. Webb reads Shelley's 'Conclusion' thus: 'the process of growth involves innumerable transformations in an ever-shifting chain of natural consequences,' in which 'death as merely another shift in structure, another stage in the continuous cycle of transformation' (Webb, *Shelley* 245). Similarly, citing *Queen Mab*, Priscilla P. St George makes a remark about the larger economy of Nature in Part III of 'The Sensitive-Plant': 'The weeds are an active writhing of the emptiness left by the Lady's passing. In mechanically ruining all, their seeming malevolence (unlike Jupiter's) is unconscious of what it kills. The visible world is the native soil of the weeds, and their appearance implies no meaning beyond the sight of them.'<sup>42</sup> As a matter of fact, in his 'Essay on A Future State' (c. 1813), Shelley contends: 'There is in the generative principle of each animal and plant a power which converts the substances by which it is surrounded into a substance homogeneous with itself. That is, the relations between certain elementary particles of matter undergo a change and submit to new

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<sup>41</sup> Webb associates this obscurity of the human perceptive organs with John Locke's discussion of the sensitive plant in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Shelley 239, 258n16).

<sup>42</sup> Priscilla P. St. George, 'The Styles of Good and Evil in "The Sensitive-Plant,"' *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64.3 (1965): 487.

combinations.<sup>43</sup> Simultaneously, to avoid a pure materialistic view of Nature, Shelley also bears in mind that ‘this principle is a certain substance which escapes the observation of the chemist and anatomist’ (178). The boundary between the physical and metaphysical realm should be explored further to shed new light on the ‘Conclusion’ of ‘The Sensitive-Plant.’

Shelley’s interest in the sensory and extra-sensory perception of Nature was already evident in his correspondence with Elizabeth Hitchener. A letter on 20 June 1811 offers a glimpse of the principle of life and death expressed in ‘The Sensitive Plant’:

—is then *soul* annihilable? Yet one of the properties of animal soul is consciousness of identity—if this is destroyed, in consequenc{e} the *soul* whose essence this is, must perish; but I conceive, & as is certainly capable of demonstration that nothing can be annihilated, but that everything appertaining to nature, consisting of constituent parts infinitely divisible, is in a continu{al} change, then do I suppose, & I think I have a right to draw this inference, that neither will soul perish; that in a future existence it will lose all consciousness of having formerly lived elsewhere, will begin life anew, possibly under a shape of which we have now no idea.

(*LPBS* 1: 110)

This cycle of life or the ‘*soul*’ was Shelley’s central concern at that time. Another letter to Hitchener dated 24 November 1811 on earthly life and afterlife, also prefigures the ‘Conclusion’ of ‘The Sensitive-Plant’:

What is the Soul? Look at yonder flower; the blast of the North sweeps it from the earth, it withers beneath the breath of the destroyer.—Yet that flower hath a soul, for what is soul but that which makes an organized

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<sup>43</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Essay on A Future State,’ *PS*, 177-78.

being to be what it is, without which it would not be so. On this hypothesis must not *that* (the soul) without which a flower cannot be a flower *exist* when the earthly flower hath perished?—Yet where does it exist, in what state of being? [...] (*LPBS* 1: 192)

This passage conveys a message that in contrast to the body, ‘intellect,’ ‘soul,’ and ‘sensibility’ never die with the body as shown by the imagery of the ‘perished’ flower. This passage is versified also in *Queen Mab* (IX 158-70), and a similar thought prompts the ‘Conclusion’ of ‘The Sensitive-Plant.’ Shelley’s hypothesis, at least, suggests that he was aware of Pythagorean metempsychosis, as in the former letter to Hitchener, where he speculates that ‘in a future existence it will lose all consciousness of having formerly lived elsewhere, will begin life anew, possibly under a shape of which we have now no idea.’

A possible source for the awareness of the Pythagorean cycle of life in Shelley’s letters is Darwin, whom Shelley was enthusiastically reading at this time. Darwin explains Nature’s cycle in *The Temple of Nature*:

Organic forms with chemic changes strive,  
Live but to die, and die but to revive!  
Immortal matter braves the transient storm,  
Mounts from the wreck, unchanging but in form.— (II 41-44)

What Darwin and the earlier Shelley share is the idea of immortality, as put forward by Pythagorean philosophy. Darwin’s idea of ‘organic happiness’ cannot be reduced to a simple Pythagorean metempsychosis, because of his materialistic and physiological view concerning mental and physical sensibility. Darwin writes in his note to these lines:

The perpetual mutability of the forms of matter seems to have struck the philosophers of great antiquity; the system of transmigration taught by Pythagoras, in which the souls of men were supposed after death to animate the bodies of a variety of animals, appears to have arisen from this source. He had observed the perpetual changes of organic matter from one creature to another, and concluded, that the vivifying spirit must attend it. (II 43n)

For Darwin, the vast system of nature exists beyond the detection of sensory perception (the naked eye). In the last sentence of this passage, Darwin combines Pythagoras's metempsychosis in terms of Nature's ecological mutation. In this sense Darwin's concept of 'organic happiness' is a complex mix of physical and metaphysical ideas.

It is not a coincidence that the younger Shelley, an avid reader of Darwin, expresses similar ideas as Darwin.<sup>44</sup> Shelley writes about an earlier version of ideas to Hitchener (24 November 1811):

I will say then, that all nature is animated, that microscopic [*sic*] vision as it hath discovered to us millions of animated beings whose pursuits and passions are as eagerly followed as our own, so might it if extended find that Nature itself was but a mass of organized animation;—*perhaps* the animative intellect of all this is in a constant rotation of change, perhaps a future state is no other than a different mode of terrestrial existence to which we have fitted ourselves in this mode.— (*LPBS* 1: 192-93)

Such a world view is precisely anticipated by Darwin's view of 'organic happiness,' constituted of 'millions of animated beings,' whereby 'Nature itself was but a mass of organized animation.' For Shelley, 'the animative intellect of all this is in a constant rotation of change' as exhibited in the 'Conclusion' of 'The Sensitive-Plant' and then in Stanza 38 of *Adonais*:

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<sup>44</sup> See also *Queen Mab* II 226-43.



but the pure spirit shall flow  
 Back to the burning fountain whence it came,  
 A portion of the Eternal, which must glow  
 Through time and change, unquenchably the same,  
 Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame. (338-41)

These lines—recalling the Lady's 'Power' emanating from her body—leads to the famous passage in Stanza 52:

The One remains, the many change and pass;  
 Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadow fly;  
 Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity,  
 Until Death tramples it to fragments. [...] (460-64)

This eternal flow of 'the many' (460) around the 'One' (460) has affinity not only with (Neo-)Platonic thought, but also with Pythagorean metempsychosis. Such a notion chimes with Shelley's letter to Hitchener, in which he states that 'perhaps a future state is no other than a different mode of terrestrial existence to which we have fitted ourselves in this mode.' At the same time, in Nature's economy as understood by Shelley and Darwin, this flow of 'the One' and 'the many' in Nature is analogous to 'Nature' as 'a mass of organized animation' and 'millions of animated beings,' in the 'microscopic vision' of natural philosophy.<sup>45</sup> In this way, Shelley, like Darwin, commingles metaphysical ideas of Pythagorean and Platonist philosophies with materialistic discourses of natural philosophy to create their own economy of Nature,

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<sup>45</sup> *Queen Mab* also shows a congruous notion of Shelley's 'organic happiness': 'Nature's soul / [...] filled the meanest worm that crawls in dust / With spirit, thought, and love' (IV 89, 100-02).

which is a clear manifestation of Romantic natural philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

In the same letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, Shelley continues to write of his world view, reminiscent of Darwin's notion of 'organic happiness' based on the power of sensibility (here Shelley uses the word 'passions'), comprised of sensations and imaginative sympathy. Shelley anticipates the same circulation of life powered by another kind of 'sensibility,' embodied as 'Free-will' and, inextricably, connected to virtue:

Is there any probability in this supposition? on this plan *congenial* souls must meet, because having fitted themselves for nearly the same mode of being, they cannot fail to be *near* each other.—Free-will must give energy to this infinite mass of being, & thereby constitute virtue—[...]. (*LPBS* 1: 193)

Shelley sees 'Nature' as 'a mass of organized animation,' which, through his microscopic vision and the animation of being as the 'infinite mass,' is sustained by 'Free-will' to improve the world. This word evokes Darwin's idea of volition as a power for improving society:

'Thy potent acts, VOLITION, still attend  
The means of pleasure to secure the end;  
To express his wishes and his wants design'd  
Language, the *means*, distinguishes Mankind;  
For *future* works in Art's ingenious schools

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<sup>46</sup> Such a materialistic view also resonates with Lucretius's atomism and obviously d'Holbach's *The System of Nature*, both of which Shelley was also reading at the time: 'Let us, therefore, content ourselves with saying *that [...] all the phenomena of Nature is ascribable to the diversified motion of the variety of matter she contains; and which like the phenix, is continually regenerating out of her own ashes*' (1:23 [1:26-27]). D'Holbach goes on to write about the regeneration of life in Nature as 'the general mass of things' or 'the eternal circle of mutation,' to which 'Animals, plants, and minerals, after a lapse of time, give back' (1:26 [1:33]). Although there is no proof that Shelley was aware of d'Holbach, their ideas resonate with fairly a modern perspective on the circulating eco-system of Nature. See also Shelley's *A Refutation of Deism*, especially Eusebes's speech (*PWPBS* 1: 116).

His hands unwearied form and finish tools [...]. (III 435-40)

This 'VOLITION' (435) functions as the 'means of pleasure to secure the end' (436), to create '*future*' (439). Any creative and 'potent acts' (435) always entail the use of skilful hands, that is, the sense of touch. This is further illustrated in Darwin's footnote: 'It was before observed, how much the superior accuracy of our sense of touch contributes to increase our knowledge; but it is the greater energy and activity of the power of volition, that marks mankind, and has given them the empire of the world' (III 435n). For both Shelley and Darwin, 'free-will' coalesce with the power of volition takes on a tinge of political and moral philosophy.<sup>47</sup> Shelley and Darwin expect the readers of their respective poems to possess these sensations and be connected to sympathy and imagination. The more enhanced this sympathy is, the more 'organic happiness' on earth increases, because it is recognised through the right degree of sensibility that, in turn, is the source of sympathy.

Understanding Shelley's notion of 'organic happiness,' thus, leads to a new interpretation of the 'Conclusion' of 'The Sensitive-Plant,' the most enigmatic and problematic part of this poem. Central to the following discussion is Shelley's use of the word 'delight' (I 113) in the first part of the poem, when the Sensitive-plant lived with 'bliss' (9) and slept at night after its daily 'delight,' while, in the second part, when the Lady as the gardener keeps the garden unified, where the flowers '[r]ejoiced' (II 30) in a harmonious mood. In the close of the second part, the demise of the Lady

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<sup>47</sup> Shelley, similarly, writes of 'perception' and 'volition' in his 'Note 13' to *Queen Mab* (CPPBS 2: 264).

irrecoverably changes the garden's atmosphere. At this moment, Shelley's use of the word 'delight' in this poem strikes a chord with Darwin's idea of 'organic happiness' in conjunction with the conceptions of sensibility and nature's economy. All earthly beings return to nature in the end, in which one death generates or contributes to the next life: 'death itself must be, / Like all the rest, a mockery.' After their death, the corpses of the Sensitive-plant and Lady will become part of another life, since 'all sweet shapes and odours there, / In truth have never passed away.' For instance, plant-respiration, the predator-prey relationship, and the functions of microbes—all of them are parts of Nature's cycle, which exceed sensory perception. In this respect, even though they appear to be dead, they do not actually, and the whole process is invisible. Only the existence of 'delight' is perceived by the 'sensorium' (e.g. irritation, sensation, volition, and association) as Darwin calls it. The acoustic relation between 'light'—which has a close relation to microscopic optics—and 'delight' in the last four lines of 'The Sensitive-Plant' should not be forgotten. Now the image of light has been transformed from the transcendental and invisible, which is beyond our sensory organs, to that of the sunlight composed of photon flux, invisible but vital to the growth of plants which absorb and decompose the light into water and oxygen to circulate life endlessly on earth. By so doing, from light plants produce delight and happiness, which by no means pass away, but rather increase continually. In this way, Darwin's economy of Nature enables us to read Shelley's concluding lines of 'The Sensitive-Plant' through the concept of 'organic happiness' as a compound of physical and

metaphysical views of the world.

### 3. 'Organic Happiness' and Literary Circulations

Through this natural circulation of life on earth, 'The Sensitive-Plant' proposes that nothing will remain eternally dead in nature. This organic chain of sensibility can also be applied to the relationship between the author and reader—between eighteenth-century natural philosophy and Darwin, and between Darwin and Shelley. Textual echoes of Darwin in Shelley's writings suggest that Shelley would already have had knowledge of Darwin's idea of 'organic happiness.'<sup>48</sup> Therefore, as Darwin's philosophical writings took over and versified the discoveries of his eighteenth-century precursors, so Shelley versifies Darwin's botanical observations and theories.

Shelley's poetic thoughts influenced by Darwin's idea were digested and transformed by the youthful Alfred Tennyson. Shelley's later poem 'The Cloud,' a poetic variant on the theme of 'The Sensitive-Plant,' deals with a similar circulatory system of nature. The cloud in Shelley's poem is described in the same way as 'The Sensitive-Plant,' but with an increased focus on the physical circulation in nature:

I am the daughter of Earth and Water,  
And the nursling of the Sky;  
I pass through the pores, of the oceans and shores;  
I change, but I cannot die—  
[.....]  
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,

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<sup>48</sup> For the link between vegetarianism and the food chain in Shelley's other works, see Chapin, 'Shelley's Great Chain of Being' 156-60.

I arise, and unbuild it again.— (73-76, 83-84)

Like the water cycle referred to in the first part of 'The Sensitive-Plant,' the cloud never dies but transmutes itself into other forms as a 'child' (83) or 'ghost' (83). The phrase 'I change, but I cannot die' (76) has affinities with the 'Ode to the West Wind' as well as 'The Sensitive-Plant.' As Baker says, these are 'emblem[s] of permanence in a world of change' (Baker 202). This phrase clearly influenced Shelley's ardent reader, Tennyson. In his poem 'Nothing Will Die' (1830), Nature never dies, despite 'the world's winter' (17), because, as Tennyson later suggested, a new and rich spring 'shall make the winds blow/ [...] / Till the air / And the ground / Shall be filled with life anew' (23, 27-29).<sup>49</sup> The cycle of the four seasons and of life on earth is found both in 'The Cloud' and 'Nothing Will Die.'

In these poetical and natural philosophical echoes illuminating the intellectual history of poetry, sympathy is still a central concept. Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* becomes a reference point for this concept in relation to a reader's response to poetry. Shelley declares that poetry does influence the reader's mind, taking as his examples Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which 'embodied the ideal perfection of his age in human character' to the extent that the portrayal of the heroic characters such as 'Achilles, Hector, and Ulysses' helped form the moral sentiments of their audience or readers:

[...] the truth and beauty of friendship, patriotism and persevering devotion to an object, were unveiled to the depths in these immortal creations: the sentiments of the auditors must have been refined and

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<sup>49</sup> Alfred Tennyson, 'Nothing Will Die,' *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Harlow: Longman, 1987) 248n93.

enlarged by a sympathy with such great and lovely impersonations, until from admiring they imitated, and from imitation they identified themselves with the objects of their admiration. Nor let it be objected, that these characters are remote from moral perfection, and that they can by no means be considered as edifying patterns for general imitation. (*SPP* 516)

This principle is also demonstrated in ‘The Sensitive-Plant.’ Shelley’s Sensitive-plant decays because of its excessive sentiment, which is engendered by the death of the Lady, and it remains ‘a leafless wreck’ in the frame of this poem.<sup>50</sup> However, just as ‘love, and beauty, and delight’ never decay, so the poetic beauty, the Lady’s grace, and the Sensitive-plant’s love and delight never die in the reader’s or perceiver’s mind. In this sense, the decayed Sensitive-plant, which never actually bears fruits or seeds is—for all its appearance as a ‘leafless wreck’—now able to produce figurative seeds in the reader’s mind and imagination, just as Shelley’s ‘The Sensitive-Plant’ and ‘The Cloud’ found fertile soil in Tennyson’s ‘Nothing Will Die.’ This creative line of influence is prefigured by Shelley’s metaphor of plant-seeds for his poem in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*: ‘until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness’ (*SPP* 209). Even after its own death, the Sensitive-plant, ultimately, casts to the world its ‘seeds’ that signify hopes for a future happiness, so that the Sensitive-plant’s ‘wreck’ is analogous to Shelley’s description of the Coliseum as a

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<sup>50</sup> With regard to the relation between excessive sensibility and ‘a leafless wreck,’ O’Neill points out that the phrase ‘a leafless wreck’ echoes the common English idiom ‘nervous wreck,’ citing the same usage by Wordsworth in *Borderers* (I 336) from the *OED* (7b). See O’Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-conscious Poem* 176.

herald of the sympathetic circulations of universal 'Love'.<sup>51</sup>

Darwin's concept of 'organic happiness' in his works has shown the degree to which 'The Sensitive-Plant' is rooted both in the natural philosophy of the body and the moral philosophy of the mind. Darwin and Shelley, in this respect, share the same 'touch' or 'texture' in their literary description. Yet Shelley's 'organic happiness' does not merely indicate his poetic interest in the pleasure of all living things in nature, but also in the pleasure of sensibility itself, which extends even to the creative sympathy and imagination. Such sentiments exist in, and through, the supposed 'moral excellence' of writing and reading poetry that 'touches' the human heart.

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<sup>51</sup> For more detailed studies of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and his 'idealism' about poetic influence on his readers, see Kim Wheatley, *Shelley and His Readers: Beyond Paranoid Politics* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1999) 109-50.



## Chapter VI

### ‘Warm Fragrance Seems to Fall from Her Light Dress’:

#### The Psycho-physiological Imagery of Love, Light, and Scent in *Epipsychidion*

Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination.

—William Shakespeare, *King Lear*—

Odours there are, fresh as a baby’s skin,

Mellow as oboes, green as meadow grass,

—Others corrupted, rich, triumphant, full,

Having dimensions infinitely vast,

Frankincense, musk, ambergris, benjamin,

Singing the senses’ rapture, and the soul’s.

—Charles Baudelaire, ‘Correspondences’—

I’m in love, and I’ve found a woman to love me, and I mean to have the hundred other things as well. She wants me to have them—friends and work, and spiritual freedom, and everything. You and your books miss this, because your books are too sedate. Read poetry—not only Shelley. Understand Beatrice, and Clara Middleton, and Brunhilde in the first scene of *Gotterdammerung*. Understand Goethe when he says ‘the eternal feminine leads us on,’ and don’t write another English Essay.

—E. M. Forster, *The Longest Journey*—

## **Introduction: The Sense of Smell and Shelley's Figuration of Eternal Beauty**

This chapter examines *Epipsychidion*, a long love lyric dedicated to Teresa Viviani, whom Shelley called Emilia or Emily, focusing on the effects of the sense of smell at work in the depiction of sympathetic love. The relation of fragrant imagery to sympathetic love that pervades this poem is under-explored, despite the fact that Fogle's *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley* (1949) has pointed out the fact that Shelley uses words related to odour twenty-two times in his poetry (Fogle 177).<sup>1</sup> In *Epipsychidion*, such odorous imagery emerges as a sensuous effect to portray an idealised Emily like Venus. Glenn O'Malley's reading of *Epipsychidion* in his *Shelley's Synaesthesia* (1964) examines Shelley's particular use and pattern of synaesthetic imagery for Venus, what he calls 'the Venus complex' that penetrates throughout his poetic world (27-33, 58-88). As a precursor to O'Malley, W. B. Yeats is one of the earliest critics who perceived this Hesperian attribute combined with the Platonic imagery of two Venuses (the celestial and intellectual *Urania* and the earthly and sensual *Pandemos*) that permeates Shelley's poetry. Yeats summarises this point in 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' (1900):

The most important, the most precise of all Shelley's symbols, the one he uses with the fullest knowledge of its meaning, is the Morning and Evening Star. It rises and sets for ever over the towers and rivers, and is the throne of his genius. Personified as a woman it leads Rousseau, the typical

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, Fogle emphasises that Shelley tends to vivify olfactory imagery through negative and repulsive descriptions rather than pleasant ones that 'convey merely a vague emotional ecstasy' (86). Even Grabo, like Fogle, remarks on the synaesthetic aspects of Shelley's poetry: 'Shelley is essentially an eye-minded poet. Sound, touch, and smell are vastly less important in his sensational experience' (*A Newton among Poets* 89-90).

poet of *The Triumph of Life*, under the power of the destroying hunger of life, under the power of the sun that we shall find presently as a symbol of life, and it is the Morning Star that wars against the principle of evil in *Laon and Cythna*, at first as a star with a red comet, here a symbol of all evil as it is of disorder in *Epipsychidion* [...]. We know too that had *Prince Athanase* been finished it would have described the finding of Pandemos, the Star's lower genius, and the growing weary of her, and the coming to its true genius Urania at the coming of death, as the day finds the Star at evening.<sup>2</sup>

This dual aspect of Venus, the celestial and sensual, is, as Yeats says, corresponds to the dual character of Venus as 'the Morning and Evening Star.' In addition to this, from the viewpoint of Shelley's poetics of sensibility, beauty embodied by the figure of this dual Venus becomes further intensified with luxurious scent imagery commingled with beautiful light in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*. At this moment, the planetary image of the celestial Venus also takes on the character of Lucifer (the 'light-bringer').

My argument focuses on those subtle and implicit principles of Shelley's use of synaesthetic imagery of light, odour, and music, by investigating the union and vibrations of the souls as well as nerves in *Epipsychidion*, which reflect some particular philosophical discourses in the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> To begin with, I investigate the way in which Shelley's poem is influenced by eighteenth-century psycho-physiological

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<sup>2</sup> W. B. Yeats, 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry,' *Early Essays*, ed. Richard J. Finneran and George Bornstein, *The Collected Works of William Butler Yeats*, vol. 4 (New York: Scribner, 2007) 67.

<sup>3</sup> Although he does not explore it further, O'Malley aware of this aspect as he mentions 'Shelley knew both of Darwin's surveys of synaesthesia, the "Interlude" on the arts in *The Botanic Garden*, and the note in *The Temple of Nature*, interestingly entitled "Melody of Colours"' (23). The psychologist Lawrence E. Marks, in his well-researched work on cognition and perception, which covers even synaesthetic aspects in poetry, draws example from Shelley's 'synaesthetic metaphors of odor and music' in *Epipsychidion*. Lawrence E. Marks, *The Unity of the Senses: Interrelations among the Modalities* (New York: Academic, 1978) 237.

discourses, especially David Hartley's vibration theory of nerves, which was based on Isaac Newton's *Opticks* (1704). Shelley's ideas of love and sympathy in *Epipsychidion* are clearly influenced by Newton's and Hartley's theory of vibrations. Yet this Shelley-Hartley connection has rarely been examined, let alone the element of odour and the poet-narrator's memory at occasions.<sup>4</sup> This psycho-physiological or psychosomatic approach to *Epipsychidion* focused on the sense of smell reveals the kernel of Shelley's poetics of sensibility and its origin in the doctrine that sympathetic love and sensuous pleasure are inseparable from poetic inspiration. This inspiration has also much to do with the desire of creation as embodied by ideal Beauty or the 'eternal feminine'—to borrow Goethe's word '*Ewig-Weibliche*'—whom the poet-narrator encounters in his spirit's 'visioned wanderings' (191).<sup>5</sup> This poetic or figurative abstraction of Emily further illuminates how closely Shelley's pursuit of ideal Beauty is associated with the sense of smell and poetic memories in his poetics of sensibility.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Exceptionally, Mark Bruhn compares Hartley's theory with Shelley's theory of mind, and Ann Wroe has discussed Shelley's marginal notes to Hartley's *Observations on Man*. Wroe's article underpins my argument to a high degree, by highlighting trembling and vibrating imagery as a major characteristic of Shelley's poetry. Mark J Bruhn, 'Shelley's Theory of Mind: From Radical Empiricism to Cognitive Romanticism,' *Poetics Today* 30.3 (2009): 373-422; and Ann Wroe, 'Shelley's Good Vibrations: His Marginal Notes to Hartley's *Observations on Man*,' *The Wordsworth Circle* 41.1(2010): 38.

<sup>5</sup> For the 'eternal feminine,' see Woodman, 227; Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) 176. Fekete also mentions *Epipsychidion* in his chapter entitled 'The Eternal Feminine: Shelley and Intellectual Beauty.' Yet Fekete has not gone further than describing Shelley's vision of 'Ideal Beauty' from the viewpoint of the 'Eternal Feminine' in the Western literary tradition such as Beatrice for Dante (Fekete 215-21).

<sup>6</sup> As Ghislaine McDayter points out, the ending of *Epipsychidion* shows Shelley's desire to prolong his writing, or his desire of creation for creation's sake: '[w]hat both Dante and Shelley's fantasies teach us is that their desire is to continue to desire, to continue to write.' Ghislaine McDayter, 'O'er Leaping the Bounds: The Sexing of the Creative Soul in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*,' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 52 (2003): 39.

## 1. Light, Odour, and Vibration: Shelley's Vibration Theory of Love and Sympathy

### Newton's Optics and Vibration Theory

If light is the central image in Shelley's poetry, *Epipsychidion* is the poem that best demonstrates this fact. Shelley's rhetoric of love (addressed to Emily) is a manifestation of an ideal love depicted through an array of sensuous imagery:

True Love in this differs from gold and clay,  
That to divide is not to take away.  
Love is like understanding, that grows bright,  
Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light,  
Imagination! which from earth and sky,  
And from the depths of human phantasy,  
As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills  
The Universe with glorious beams, and kills  
Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow  
Of its reverberated lightning. Narrow  
The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates,  
The life that wears, the spirit that creates  
One object, and one form, and builds thereby  
A sepulchre for its eternity. (160-73)

The song identifies 'True Love' (160) with imaginative 'light' (163). Curiously, the 'glorious beam' (167) spreads throughout the 'Universe' (167) like 'a thousand prisms and mirrors' (166), through which fly 'many a sun-like arrow' (168). As Reiman and Fraistat rightly note, this imaginative analogy alludes to the mythological episode in which Apollo slays the python, which is described as 'Error, the worm' (*Poetry and Prose* 397n5). And in 'Song of Apollo' (1820), the same imagery is used by Apollo himself: 'The sunbeams are my shafts with which I kill / Deceit, that loves the night

and fears the day' (13-14). Emily, in the same way, embodies the light of 'Love' that illuminates the world.

The more important point here is, however, that the 'reverberated lightning' (169) of 'Imagination' (164) resonates with Newtonian optics and its explanation of light and vibration. It is well known that Blake opposed Newtonian physics in his painting *Newton* (1795), and that, for Lamb and Keats, Newton's *Opticks* 'had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow by reducing it to its prismatic colours.'<sup>7</sup> Yet these scientific innovations of Newton and his followers had provided poetic inspirations for later poets, like Shelley, as demonstrated by Carl Grabo in *Newton among the Poets*—his title is taken from Alfred North Whitehead's famous phrase for Shelley—who notes that Shelley derived his astronomical knowledge from Newton's *Opticks* and other works (Grabo 5, 15, 89-103).<sup>8</sup> Shelley had knowledge of Newtonian vibration theory of light and refers to Newton by name in his 'Note 1' to *Queen Mab*:

BEYOND our atmosphere the sun would appear a rayless orb of fire in the midst of a black concave. The equal diffusion of its light on earth is owing to the refraction of the rays by the atmosphere, and their reflection from other bodies. Light consists either of vibrations propagated through a subtle medium, or of numerous minute particles repelled in all directions from the luminous body. (*CPPBS* 2: 239)

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Haydon*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, 1926) 269.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred North Whitehead says 'If Shelley had been born a hundred years later, the twentieth century would have seen a Newton among chemists.' Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1926; Cambridge: Cambridge, 1932). For a succinct overview of the reception of Newton and the rainbow imagery among the Romantic poets, see Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* 303-12; and Julia L. Epstein and Mark L. Greenberg, 'Decomposing Newton's Rainbow,' *The Journal of History of Ideas* 45.1 (1984): 128-40. For the relations between Shelley and Newton, see also Richard Cronin, *Colour and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1988) 25-28.

Besides this mythological allusion, this passage contains another allusion to Newton's theory of the *Opticks* in the use of prism. Throughout *Opticks*, Newton discusses his theories, observations, and queries about a wide-range of optical phenomena including the rays of sunlight and their refraction or refrangibility through a prism of glass.<sup>9</sup>

It is also important to see Shelley's reference to light which 'consists either of vibrations propagated through a subtle medium.' Newton defines 'Ether' or the 'Ethereal Medium,' which plays a significant part in *Opticks*, as 'a much subtler Medium than Air,' which influences the refraction of light (349-50). As Newton explores 'the vibrating Motion of the Ethereal Medium,' 'Ether' is often associated with vibration in *Opticks* (354). In this sense the poet's imagery of light, in *Epipsychidion* (166-69), can be construed in terms of Newton's theory. The poet of *Epipsychidion* praises his idealised Emily by means of ethereal substance: 'An antelope, / In the suspended impulse of its lightness, / Were less ethereally light' (75-77). In addition to this passage, there are similar lines in Shelley's 'Song of Apollo,' which read: 'I feed the clouds, the rainbows and the flowers / With their ætherial colours' (19-20).<sup>10</sup> In

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<sup>9</sup> For an explanation of Newton's terminology, see Isaac Newton, *Opticks, or, A Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and Colours of Light*, ed. I. Bernard Cohen, rev. ed. (New York: Dover. 1979) 1-4.

<sup>10</sup> Similarly, rainbow-imagery is used in other poems by Shelley: 'a dome of many-coloured glass' (*Adonais* 462) or 'Iris her many coloured scarf had drawn' and 'A moving arch of victory, the vermilion / And green and azure plumes of Iris had / Built light over her wind-winged pavilion' (*The Triumph of Life* 357, 439-41). Yet, with regard to this imagery from *Adonais*, Cronin, by looking at the fact that 'the dome "Stains" white radiance,' warns the reader not to 'bring them [only] into line with scientific orthodoxy' (*Colour and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* 26-27). From these images of the rainbow, Frederick Burwick points out 'the relevance of Goethe's idea of light and color exhibiting the permanence in change, the change in permanence,' rather than that of Newton. F. Frederick Burwick *The Damnation of Newton: Goethe's Color Theory and Romantic Perception* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986) 272.

both quotations the words ‘ætherial’ and ‘aethereally’ not only signify celestial and delicate beauty, but also echo Newtonian physics either directly, or as it had been mediated by eighteenth-century natural philosophers.

In *Epipsychidion*, alongside the ethereal substance, the idealised Emily is portrayed with ‘the brightness / Of her divinest presence trembles through / Her limbs’ (77-79). Here the trembling ‘brightness’ (77) from the Emily-like figure—which marks a variation on the ‘reverberated lightning’—provides another link with Newton’s *Opticks*. This optical appearance of the feminine-figure created in the eye delineates the importance of vibrations in the optical mechanism of the body, which are caused by rays of light as explained in Query 12: ‘Do not the Rays of Light in falling upon the bottom of the Eye excite Vibrations in the *Tunica Retina*? Which Vibrations, being propagated along the solid Fibres of the optick Nerves into the Brain, cause the Sense of feeling’ (345). Newton goes on to discuss this topic from Query 13 to 17.<sup>11</sup> From Query 18, the focus then moves to the way in which the ‘Ethereal Medium’ influences the corporeal reaction of the body to the rays of light. In Query 23, Newton hypothesises vibrations of nerves in the eyes and brain stimulated by ‘the Rays of Light’:

Is not Vision perform’d chiefly by the Vibrations of this [Ethereal] Medium, excited in the bottom of the Eye by the Rays of Light, and propagated through the solid, pellucid and uniform Capillamenta of the optick Nerves into the place of Sensation? And is not Hearing perform’d by the

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<sup>11</sup> See also Grabo, *Newton* 92; Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse: Newton’s Opticks and the Eighteenth Century Poets* (1946; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) 2.



Vibrations either of this or some other Medium, excited in the auditory Nerves by the Tremors of the Air, and propagated through the solid, pellucid and uniform Capillamenta of those Nerves into the place of Sensation? And so of the other Senses. (353)

Newton presumes that vibrations of the ‘Nerves’ in the human brain are caused by the light. This explanation corresponds to the process of the ‘spirit that creates / One object, and one form’ through the ‘reverberated lightning’ of the imagination in *Epipsychidion* (170-72). Such a context explains the phrase ‘many a sun-like arrow / Of its reverberated lightning,’ in *Epipsychidion*, which possesses an affinity with Newton’s hypothesis that the rays of light pass into and vibrate nerves in the sensorium through the vibrating ‘Ethereal Medium.’<sup>12</sup>

### **Hartley’s Theory of Vibrations and Shelley’s Theory of Sympathetic Love**

The queries by Newton, especially Query 23, as C. U. M Smith points out, anticipate David Hartley’s neurophysiology.<sup>13</sup> Hartley’s *Observations on Man* (1749) extended Newton’s neurophysiological interest into the field of psychology, particularly associationism, as developed by the British empiricists, John Locke and David Hume (Hartley 5-6).<sup>14</sup> This process involves the conception of pleasure and pain as well as

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<sup>12</sup> Curiously enough, the word ‘reverberate,’ according to the *OED*, means both ‘reflect’ (5b) and ‘vibrate with sound’(4a).

<sup>13</sup> C. U. M. Smith, ‘David Hartley’s Newtonian Neuropsychology,’ *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 23. 2 (1987): 127.

<sup>14</sup> All quotations from Hartley’s *Observations on Man* are taken from the 5th edition published in 1810, which Shelley possessed as Wroe notes in ‘Shelley’s Good Vibrations’ (36). David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations: In Two Parts*, 5th ed., vol. 1 (London, 1810) 1:11. Shelley bought this edition in 1812 (*LPBS* 1: 319). For more information about Hartley and eighteenth-century philosophy, see Bate, *From Romantic to Classic* 93-128; Robert B. Glassman and Hugh W. Buckingham, ‘David Hartley’s Neural Vibrations and Psychological Associations,’ Harry Whitaker, C.U.M. Smith, and Stanley Finger

automatic (involuntary) and voluntary motions in the human body resulting from vibrations in the brain (1-3).

Hartley's doctrine of vibrations in the psychological mechanism of the human body bears an interesting resemblance to Shelley's discussion of the harmonious vibrations of nerves. Shelley writes as follows in his essay 'On Love,' written two years before *Epipsychidion*:

If we reason we would be understood; if we imagine we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's, if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own, that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is Love. (*SPP* 503-04)

This explanation of love obviously anticipates *Epipsychidion*, especially the following lines: 'And our veins beat together; and our lips / With other eloquence than words, eclipse / The soul that burns between them' (566-68). Shelley's figurative interpretation of 'Love,' between the two interacting hearts resonating or 'quivering,' reflects Hartley's theory of nervous vibrations. Shelley further expounds the neuro-physiological mechanism of 'Love' in the heart or soul using both the terminology of optics and vibration:

We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particulars of which our

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178; and Bruhn, 386-87.

nature is composed: a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it. (*SPP* 504)

The words ‘a miniature as it were of our entire self’ and ‘a soul within our soul’ signify an *epipsyche*, one of the essential notions in *Epipsychidion*, as shown in such lines as ‘I am not thine: I am part of *thee*’ (52), ‘this soul out of my soul’ (238); and ‘a soul within the soul’ (455).<sup>15</sup> From line 86 to 104, *Epipsychidion* figuratively exemplifies the topic Shelley discusses in ‘On Love.’ Both the ‘starry spirits’ (86) and the ‘sun-beams’ are dancing and leaping to enchant the ‘thought and sense’ (90) through their dynamic and kinetic energy. In accordance with this kinetic mode, Emily’s ‘glory of her being’ (91) animates ‘the dead, blank, and cold air’ (92) through ‘a warm shade / Of unentangled intermixture, made / By Love, of light and motion’ (92-94).

The following lines of *Epipsychidion* constitute the quintessence of Shelley’s neuro-physiological imagery, and can be examined further through the vibration theories discussed in ‘On Love’ as well as the works of Newton and Hartley.<sup>16</sup> Shelley often depicts his ideal feminine figure with light imagery. In *Epipsychidion*, Emily’s powerful force is depicted as follows:

[...] one intense  
Diffusion, one serene Omnipresence,

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<sup>15</sup> For more details about the title of *Epipsychidion*, see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley* 278-81.

<sup>16</sup> Webb notes that in line 91-104 Shelley ‘seems to combine the language of science with that of religious devotion.’ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poems and Prose*, ed. Timothy Webb. Critical Selection George E. Donaldson (London: Dent, 1995) 422n91ff.

Whose flowing outlines mingle in their flowing,  
 Around her cheeks and utmost fingers glowing  
 With the unintermitted blood, which there  
 Quivers, (as in a fleece of snow-like air  
 The crimson pulse of living morning quiver,)  
 Continuously prolonged, and ending never,  
 Till they are lost, and in that Beauty furl'd  
 Which penetrates and clasps and fills the world;  
 Scarce visible from extreme loveliness. (94-104)<sup>17</sup>

The word 'quiver' rhyming with 'never' underlines the poet's belief that the 'quiver' of the 'flowing' is 'ending never.'<sup>18</sup> The comparison between the 'blood' and 'the crimson pulse of living morning' intensify somatic sensation and sensuous pleasure, as if the light harmonised and spread throughout the world. In *Epipsychidion*, Emily's 'fingers glowing / With the unintermitted [and quivering] blood' (97-98) recall the Lady's 'glowing fingers' in 'The Sensitive-Plant' (II 31-32). While these vibrations are a source of flowing sympathies and resonances between soul and soul in Shelley's vibration theory, Emily's force, emanating from her body, recalls the theory of effluvia understood as magnetic force or electricity in vitalist terms.<sup>19</sup> *Epipsychidion* anticipates these magnetic qualities of love in a different way:

Twin Spheres [Emily and Mary] of light who rule this passive Earth,  
 This world of loves, this *me*; and into birth  
 Awaken all its fruits and flowers, and dart  
 Magnetic might into its central heart' [...]. (345-48)

<sup>17</sup> For a similar description of the 'quivering' sky, see *Prometheus Unbound* II i 24-27.

<sup>18</sup> For the word 'quiver' (100), see also *MW* 796n515.

<sup>19</sup> For imagery of electricity or magnetism in Shelley's poetry, see also Butter, *Shelley's Idols of the Cave* 142-58 and Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* 110-17. Gigante explores the image of the Witch of Atlas's boat in 'The Witch of Atlas' from the viewpoint of vitalism (*Life* 177-89).

The 'Magnetic' force that connects the spheres is analogous to human *elective affinities* (like the title of Goethe's novelette), as in the title 'The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient' (1822).<sup>20</sup>

These representations of emanating power among living things derive from Hartley's theory (based on Newton's *Opticks*), in which light consists of vibrations and as a kind of electricity termed 'effluvia.' Hartley's *Observations on Man* define the concept of 'effluvia' in this way:

7. The effluvia of electric bodies seem to have vibrating motions. For they are excited by friction, patting, and heat; and excite light, sound, and a pricking sensation. They have also a repulsive power in respect of each other, as the particles of air have; and therefore must, like them, be easily susceptible of vibrations. Their motions along hempen strings resemble the motions along the nerves in sensation and muscular contraction; and their attractive powers, at the end of such strings, resemble the power of the sensations over the muscles for contracting them. So that electricity is also connected in various ways with the doctrine of vibrations. (28)

Hartley's physiological explanation of the 'effluvia' and their relation to 'vibrating motions' corresponds to the description of the proto-*epipsyche* of Shelley's 'On Love' at a metaphysical level. At the physical level, this sympathetic interaction between the two souls (or hearts) refers to the resonance of the nerves between a soul and 'its antitype':

The discovery of its antitype: the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own, an imagination which should

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<sup>20</sup> Shelley uses similar imagery to depict human relationship in *A Defence of Poetry*: 'The sacred links of that chain have never been entirely disjoined, which descending through the minds of many men is attached to those great minds whence as from a magnet the invisible effluence is sent forth which at once connects, animates and sustains the life of all' (*SPP* 522).

enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities, which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret, with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own; and of a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands: this is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends; and to attain which it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that without the possession of which there is no rest or respite to the heart over which it rules. Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings and yet they sympathise not with us, we love the flowers, the grass and the waters and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring in the blue air there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart. (*SPP* 504)<sup>21</sup>

For Shelley, ‘Love,’ which is inseparable from ‘sympathy,’ is based on the resonant vibrations of the nerves between humans. This mechanism of the mind is symbolised by the simile of ‘the chords of two exquisite lyres’ for the framed human nerves which, ‘strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own.’ In so far as the strings are touched or plucked, humans can both resonate with, and feel, love even beyond human beings such as the love for ‘the very leaves of spring in the blue air.’ In *Epipsychidion*, the poet-narrator uses a similar image of musical harmony to express the relation between two persons:

We—are we not formed, as notes of music are,  
For one another, though dissimilar;  
Such difference without discord, as can make  
Those sweetest sounds, in which all spirits shake

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<sup>21</sup> The young Shelley had already come up with a similar notion to this passage from ‘On Love’ in a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener on 24th November 1811: ‘purity truth reason virtue all sanctify a friendship which shall endure when the *love* of common souls shall sleep where the shroud moulders around their *soul-less* bodies—What a rhapsody!’ (*LPBS* 1: 191).

As trembling leaves in a continuous air? (142-46)

Shelley does not use the imagery of a musical instrument here, but, as is shown in 'On Love,' instead uses a metaphor of musical harmony between the poet and Emily who blend 'without discord' (144). More pertinently, Shelley's simile of 'trembling leaves in a continuous air' (146) suggests the harmonious vibration between 'spirits' which produces the 'sweetest sounds' (145).

With regard to the imagery of the musical instrument, there is an intriguing difference between Shelley and Hartley in their accounts of the operation of vibrations. In his proposition 4 of *Observations on Man*, Hartley discusses the vibrations of the minute particles of the nerves and the brain:

THESE vibrations are motions backwards and forwards of the small particles; of the same kind with the oscillations of pendulums, and the tremblings of the particles of sounding bodies. They must be conceived to be exceedingly short and small, so as not to have the least efficacy to disturb or move the whole bodies of the nerves or brain. For that the nerves themselves should vibrate like musical strings, is highly absurd; nor was it ever asserted by Sir *Issac Newton*, or any of those who have embraced his notion of the performance of sensation and motion, by means of *vibrations*.  
(11-12)<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The analogy of the music instrument for the vibration of nerves goes back, at least, to George Cheyne's *The English Malady*:

I have formerly suggested, that the best *Similitude* I can form of the Nature and Actions of this *Principle* upon the *Organs* of its Machin [*sic*], is that of a skilful *Musician* playing on a well-tun'd Instrument. So long as the Instrument is in due Order, so long is the Musick perfect and compleat in its Kind. As it weakens or breaks, the *Harmony* is spoil'd or stop'd.. (69)

The imagery of the human mind as a lyre is already found in Plato. See also Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, *Complete Works*, ed. John Madison Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997) 75.

Hartley denies the analogy of the musical instrument for the vibrations of nerves which, evidently, influences Shelley's analogy of 'the chords of two exquisite lyres' for the mechanisms of love. However, William Drummond, of whom Shelley was an avid reader, in *Academical Questions*, refutes Hartley's argument:

But if it be absurd to suppose, that the nerves vibrate like musical chords, is it, indeed, much less absurd to maintain, that they oscillate like *pendula*? The chord vibrates, and the *pendulum* oscillates upon the same principle. If therefore, we say, that a nerve cannot vibrate, we shall also be probably inclined to say with Haller, *neque oscillationes in nervo produci possunt* [nor oscillations in the nerve can be produced].<sup>23</sup>

Having read both Hartley and Drummond by the time he wrote *Epipsychidion*, Shelley—who was also aware of new discoveries in early nineteenth-century natural sciences by Humphry Davy, William Lawrence, and others—who would have known that those books by Hartley and Newton were not infallible. We can recognise this point from Shelley's 'Note 13' to *Queen Mab*.

The being called God by no means answers with the conditions prescribed by Newton; it bears every mark of a veil woven by philosophical conceit, to hide the ignorance of philosophers even from themselves. They borrow the threads of its texture from the anthropomorphism of the vulgar. Words have been used by sophists for the same purposes, from the occult qualities of the peripatetics to the *effluvium* [magnetical effluvia] of Boyle and the *crinities* [from Latin *crinis* & *crinitus*, the long tail of a comet] or *nebulae* of Herschel. (*CPPBS* 2: 268)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> William Drummond, *Academical Questions*, ed. Terence Allan Hoagwood (Delmar: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints) 290-91. Drummond also objects to Hartley's theories of *aether* and *effluvia*. See also G.. S. Rousseau 'Discourses of the Nerve' 229-30.

<sup>24</sup> See also Reiman and Fraistat's Commentary (627-28); William Hazlitt, 'Remarks on the Systems of Hartley and Helvétius,' 1:50-91; and Andrew J. Welburn, *Power and Self-Consciousness in the Poetry of Shelley* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1986) 69-86. For the



Shelley was even familiar with the occult qualities of these natural philosophical discourses. As this passage shows, Shelley had enough natural philosophical knowledge not naïvely to believe in the theories of his scientific precursors. This does not mean that Shelley was only critical of these ‘occult qualities.’ Shelley positively alludes to the ‘philosophical conceit’ in his poetry, rather than mocking them. It is also not the case that Shelley always displays accurate knowledge of science, but he did often make use of theories of physics and neuro-physiology—including occult ones—already recognised as obsolete in the eighteenth century. Such theories enriched his poetic imagery, and for this reason, it is difficult to know to what extent Shelley was serious. Championing some natural philosophical ideas, Shelley’s poetic imagery is saturated by new theories of physics and neuro-physiology, including the occult, which had been current in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries.

### **Hartley’s Theory of Vibration and Shelley’s Memories of Scent**

The recurrent image of fragrance related to Emily signifies a subtle link between Shelley’s knowledge of neurophysiology and Hartley’s theory of vibrations. From his Proposition 4, for example, Hartley attests that ‘the senses of feeling, taste, and smell, in the same manner as [are] to those of sight and hearing’(12). It is revealing to explore

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relationship between music and vibrations, see Kimiyo Ogawa, “‘Suspended’ Sense in *Alastor*: Shelley’s Medical Trope and Eighteenth Century Medical Discourse,’ *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth Century British Poetry*, ed. Phyllis Weliver (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) 50-69. For fibre theory in eighteenth-century physiology, see Hisao Ishizuka, ‘The Elasticity of the Animal Fibre: Movement and Life in Enlightenment Medicine,’ *History of Science* 44 (2006): 435-68 and also ‘Enlightening the Fibre-Woven Body: William Blake and Eighteenth-Century Fibre Medicine,’ *Literature and Medicine* 25.1 (2006): 72-92.

the sense of smell in relation to the vibrations of the nerves, by juxtaposing Hartley's theory of the sensation of smell with the fragrant imagery of *Epipsychidion*.

Hartley addresses the sense of smell in Section III of *Observations of Man*. The sense of smell, Hartley says, is only explicable in terms of the vibration theory of particles: 'air-particles are *electrics per se*, they may have, on this account, a peculiar fitness for conveying and impressing smells' (188); this system of course results in 'the great subtlety of *odoriferous effluvia* [which] favours the doctrine of vibrations' (190). The sense of smell is categorised in terms of the psychological aspect of associationism, in which the association of ideas is caused by the vibrations of nerves. Hartley claims that the senses of taste and smell are closely related (as both of them come through 'uvula') in terms of the psychological principle of pleasure and displeasure, which is built on the human nervous system:

We may suppose the intellectual pleasures and pains, which are deducible from the flavours, grateful and ungrateful, that ascend behind the *uvula* into the nose during mastication, and just after deglutition, to have been considered in the last section under the head of taste, since these flavours are always esteemed a part of the tastes of aliments and medicines. And indeed the olfactory nerves seem to have as great a share in conveying to us both the original and derivative pleasures, which are referred to the taste, as the nerves of the tongue [...]. (192)

This proposition clearly suggests that these odours recall and associate themselves with particular ideas stored in the brain-memory. Hartley illustrates this point in Proposition 52 '*To give an Account of the Ideas generated by the several Odours*':

What has been delivered concerning the ideas of feeling and taste, may

be applied to the smell. We cannot, by the power of our will or fancy, raise up any miniatures or ideas of particular smells, so as to perceive them evidently. However, the associated circumstances seem to have some power of affecting the organ of smell, and the corresponding part of the brain, in a particular manner; whence we are prepared to receive and distinguish the several smells more readily, and more accurately, on account of the previous influence of these associated circumstances. And, conversely, the actual smells of natural bodies enable us to determine them, though we do not see them, always negatively, and often positively, *i.e.* by suggesting their names, and visible appearances. And, when we are at a loss in the last respect, the name or visible appearance of the body will immediately revive the connexion. (193)

According to this principle, the experience of smelling is determined by the odours stored within the brain, a notion anticipating Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. Proust's narrator Marcel recalls his childhood prompted by the taste and smell of the *madeleine*.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the involuntary memories of smell are also associated with breathing, in short, *inspiration*. Hartley supposes that the sense of smell is '*influenced by voluntary and semi-voluntary powers*' (Proposition 54): 'The short, quick, alternate inspirations and expirations, by which we distinguish smells in perfection, are in men, entirely, a voluntary action, derived partly from common respiration, partly from sneezing, the prospect of pleasure and convenience concurring to it, and modelling it, as in other cases' (197).

This relationship between memories of odour and its inspiration is clearly depicted

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<sup>25</sup> Marcel recollects: 'suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray [...] my Aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime-blossom.' Marcel Proust, *The Way by Swanns*, trans. Lydia Davis, *In Search of Lost Time*, gen. ed. Christopher Prendergast, vol. 1 (2002; London: Penguin, 2003) 49.

in Shelley's poetry, as encapsulated by a short poem entitled 'Memory' (1821-1822), which, written around the time of *Epipsychidion*, exemplifies Hartley's theory:

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,  
Are heaped for the beloved's bed,  
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,  
Love itself shall slumber on....

Music, when soft voices die,  
Vibrates in the memory.—  
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,  
Live within the sense they quicken.— (1-8)

The sensuous imagery of flowers and music evokes the speaker's own 'memory' (6) along with a vicarious pleasure. For example, the image of a rose forms a bridge between 'the beloved' (2) and 'thy thoughts' (3) by prompting a mental association. In this way the fragrance of 'sweet violets' (7) restores the speaker's memory through the olfactory sense. Intriguingly, Shelley employs two images of flowers to highlight the theme that memories are invariably conjured up through the senses. In Shelley's poetry, flower imagery often brings together the sense of odour, memory and love, as seen in the lyric 'Memory,' in which, even after the 'sweet violets' wither, their sensuous '[o]dours' (7) still remain in his memory. Similarly, in the opening stanza of *Epipsychidion*, the poet 'suspend[s]' to her his 'votive wreaths of withered memory' (4) in his 'heart's temple' (3).

As we have seen, the poet of *Epipsychidion* emphasises the element of smell more than other elements such as sight, touch, and sound, but it is important to note the fact

that all the images of smell are associated with flower imagery. Shelley, intentionally, associates the scent of Emily with flowers, and employs the same technique in another poem dedicated to Emily, entitled 'To Emilia Viviani' (1821):

MADONNA, wherefore hast thou sent to me  
Sweet-basil and mignonette?  
Embracing love and health, which never yet  
In the same wreath might be.  
Alas, and they are wet!  
Is it with thy kisses or thy tears?  
For never rain or dew  
Such fragrance drew  
From plant or flower—the very doubt endears  
My sadness ever new,  
The sighs I breathe, the tears I shed for thee. (1-11)<sup>26</sup>

Like *Epipsychidion*, this poem depicts beautiful and wretched women and, here again, Emily is associated with fragrant herbal-plants such as '[s]weet-basil and mignonette' (2) 'wet' (4) with her 'tears' (6). Shelley's association of Emily with flowers is inseparable from his aesthetic experience as in his description of beautiful landscape of Rome in a letter to Thomas Love Peacock, dated 23 March 1819:

Come to Rome. It is a scene by which expression is overpowered: which words cannot convey. Still further, winding half up one of these shattered pyramids by the path through the blooming copse wood you come to a little mossy lawn, surrounded by the wild shrubs; it is overgrown with anemones, wall flowers & violets whose stalks pierce the starry moss, & with radiant blue flowers whose names I know not, & which scatter thro

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<sup>26</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'To Emilia Viviani,' *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, corr. G. M. Matthews, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970) 638 (hereafter this edition is abbreviated as *PW*).

the air the divinest odour which as you recline under the shade of the ruin produces a sensation of voluptuous faintness like the combinations of sweet music. (*LPBS* 2: 85)

For Shelley, the beauty of Rome is indistinguishable from the beauty of Nature, particularly the beauty of ‘radiant blue flowers’ growing in the ruins, ‘which scatter thro the air the divinest odour.’ This ‘odour’ provides some kind of substance to this picturesque landscape of the ruin through the ‘sensations of voluptuous faintness.’ Shelley enjoys the odour, synaesthetically, ‘like the combinations of sweet music.’ In *Epipsychidion*, the imagery of fragrance commingled with music ornaments the beauty of Emily in the form of a ‘captive bird’ (5), but these lines are even more marked by their musicality:

Poor captive bird! who, from thy narrow cage,  
Pourest such music, that it might assuage  
The rugged hearts of those who prisoned thee,  
Were they not deaf to all sweet melody;  
This song shall be thy rose: its petals pale  
Are dead, indeed, my adored Nightingale!  
But soft and fragrant is the faded blossom,  
And it has no thorn left to wound thy bosom. (5-12)

The poet employs the metaphor of a ‘Nightingale’ (10) for Emily ‘prisoned’ (6) in a cell.<sup>27</sup> Harmonised with the ‘sweet melody’ (8) of the caged ‘Nightingale,’ the poet’s song is transfigured into a ‘rose’ (9) by an association with the sweetness and delicacy of the ‘soft and fragrant [...] blossom’ (11).<sup>28</sup> These figures for Emily continue her

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<sup>27</sup> Newell F. Ford, ‘The Symbolism of Shelley’s Nightingales,’ *The Modern Language Review* 55.4 (1960): 569-74.

<sup>28</sup> Shelley’s captivated ‘Nightingale’ also recalls Shakespeare’s allusion to Philomela in ‘Sonnets to Sunday Notes of Music’: ‘She, poor bird, as all forlorn, / Lean’d her breast up-till a

endless transformation into other figures throughout the poem. In such moments of Shelleyan *metamorphoses*, the imagery of fragrant flowers is frequently used as a manifestation of the synaesthetic idealisation of Emily.

## 2. The Scent of a Woman: Flowers, Odour, and the Venuses

### The Celestial and Sensuous: The Dual Aspect of Emily

As has been discussed over the decades, the concept of love, especially in its Platonic conception, is central to Shelley's *Epipsychidion*. In a letter, Shelley clearly thought of *Epipsychidion* as a versification of Plato's *Symposium*:

The Epipsychidion is a mystery—[...] I desired Ollier not to circulate this piece except to the *Σύνετοι* [cognoscenti], and even they it seems are inclined to approximate me to the circle of a servant girl & her sweetheart.—But I intend to write a Symposium of my own to set all this right. (*LPBS* 2: 363)

Further evidence to support Shelley's view averred in this letter is a fragmentary draft of *Epipsychidion*, which is published under the title of 'Passages of the Poem, or Connected Therewith' (1821). In this fragment, Shelley identifies Emily with 'an embodied Ray / Of the great brightness' (38-39), which is described in Platonic terms:

let them guess  
How Diotima, the wise prophetess,  
Instructed the instructor, and why he

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thorn' (VI 9-10). Coleridge also alludes to 'Philomel' (1) in a poem 'To the Nightingale.' Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'To the Nightingale,' *Poetical Works* 1:227. In Shelley's poetry, a nightingale's 'sweet melody' associated with roses is also found in *The Woodman and the Nightingale* (1820). This nightingale, in contrast to the captive nightingale, happily warbling 'as a tuberosa / Peoples some Indian dell with scents which lie / Like clouds above the flower from which they rose, / The singing of that happy nightingale [...]' (8-11). See also O'Malley, 90-91.

Rebuked the infant spirit of melody  
 On Agathon's sweet lips, which as he spoke  
 Was as the lovely star when morn has broke  
 The roof of darkness, in the golden dawn,  
 Half-hidden, and yet beautiful. (101-08) <sup>29</sup>

These lines identify *Epipsychidion* as a versified *Symposium*, and also call attention to processes of synaesthesia, which here operate through Venus's melodious light whose 'melody'(104) resonates with the light of the morning star in 'the golden dawn' (108).<sup>30</sup>

Shelley's sense of the importance of the 'Symposium' to *Epipsychidion* helps us to recognise that Shelley represents Emily in two different ways. On the one hand, the poet-narrator dedicates pure, celestial, and sympathetic love towards Emily; on the other, the poem itself is also filled with earthly and sensual images of Emily which may reflect the poet's sensual desire rather than the sympathetic love of friendship, implied when he calls her 'Spouse! Sister! Angel!' (130). This dual aspect of Emily is further illuminated by analogy with Venus as expounded in Shelley's translation of *Symposium* (*The Banquet*), which further strengthens the connection between *Epipsychidion* and the Venus symbolism.<sup>31</sup> In the *Symposium* Pausanias speaks of two types of the figure

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<sup>29</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Passages of the Poem, or Connected Therewith,' *PW* 426-30. For an detailed analysis of the relations of this fragment to *Epipsychidion* from the viewpoint of textual criticism, see Tatsuo Tokoo, 'The Composition of "Epipsychidion": Some Manuscript Evidence,' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 42 (1993): 97-103.

<sup>30</sup> Compare Shelley's version of Plato's Epigram on Aster, entitled 'To Stella':

Thou wert the morning-star among the living,  
 Ere thy fair light had fled—  
 Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving  
 New splendour to the dead.—

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'To Stella,' *POS*, 3:722.

<sup>31</sup> In light of such a duality in Shelley's poetry, Joseph Barrell observes that 'it is clear to Shelley, whither the combination of Platonic voluntarism and romantic emotionalism is



of Venus associated with 'Love.'<sup>32</sup> Pausanias distinguishes between two types of Love—intellectual and sensual:

If Love were one, it would be well. But since Love is not one, I will endeavour to distinguish which is the Love whom it becomes us to praise, and having thus discriminated one from the other, will attempt to render him who is the subject of our discourse the honour due to his divinity. We all know that Venus is never without Love; and if Venus were one, Love would be one; but since there are two Venuses, of necessity also must there be two Loves. For assuredly are there two Venuses; one, the eldest, the daughter of Uranus, born without a mother, whom we call the Uranian; the other younger, the daughter of Jupiter and Dione, whom we call the Pandemian;—of necessity must there also be two Loves, the Uranian and Pandemian companions of these Goddesses. (*The Banquet* 421-22)

Unlike 'the Uranian,' the 'Love' ascribed to 'the Venus Pandemos' is inspired by mundane or sensual elements in the physical world, in short, 'the body rather than the soul' (*The Banquet* 422). Such a desire is described through sensuous metaphors rather than a sensual depiction of Emily herself. In this respect, scholars such as Edward E. Bostetter and William A. Ulmer might be right to claim that Shelley's suppressed infatuation for Emily pervades *Epipsychidion*.<sup>33</sup> To a degree, this alternation between

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conducting him.' Joseph Barrell, *Shelley and the Thought of His Time: A Study in the History of Ideas* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1947) 171. For a full account of the Platonic influence on *Epipsychidion*, see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley* 275-91; and Agnes Péter, 'A Hermeneutical Reading of *Epipsychidion*,' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 42 (1971): 120-27. Daniel Stempel interprets the conception of love in *Epipsychidion* through Diotima's speech on 'the ladder of love' to illustrate the ascension from physical love to the intellectual love for the ideal Beauty. Daniel Stempel, 'Shelley and the Ladder of Love,' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 15 (1966): 17. For further information about Shelley's Italian connection at the time, see Alan M. Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991) 135-72.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Grabo's *Magic Plant* and Glenn O'Malley's *Shelley and Synaesthesia* have offered an intriguing interpretation (*Shelley* 240-42; O'Malley 89-111). For Harold Bloom's objection to (Neo-)Platonic exegeses, see Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*. (1959; Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1969) 205-07.

<sup>33</sup> Bostetter observes that Shelley's basis of love is formed by physical love, no matter how he

the 'Uranian' Venus (associated with celestial Love) and 'Pandemian' Venus (associated with sensual Love), ironically, indicates both an idealised Emily (Teresa) and the real Emily at once issued in an idealised woman.

The Uranian-Venus is more familiar in Shelley's poetry and appears in *Adonais* as a lover in the garden of Adonis, who laments the death of her beloved Adonais. As Joseph Barrell notes, the Uranian is a manifestation of Shelley's 'idealization of passion.' (163). In *Epipsychidion*, Emily is all but deified as a '[s]weet Spirit' (1) similar to the Uranian-Venus:

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,  
Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman  
All that is insupportable in thee  
Of light, and love, and immortality!  
Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse!  
Veiled Glory of this lampless Universe!  
Thou Moon beyond the clouds! Thou living Form  
Among the Dead! Thou Star above the Storm!  
Thou Wonder, and thou Beauty, and thou Terror! (21-29)

The poet identifies Emily, the 'radiant form of Woman' (22), with the celestial entity of a 'Seraph of Heaven' (21) or 'Veiled Glory of this lampless Universe' (26), in order to admire the Uranian-Venus replete with 'Wonder,' 'Beauty,' and even 'Terror' (29). The

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tries to emphasise the celestial aspect of Emily: 'The important point is that in its symbolic action, the conclusion of the poem presents a union with a 'real' woman (as Keats would say) which is as much physical as spiritual even though there is no explicit "sexual connection"' (248). Edward E. Bostetter, 'Shelley and the Mutinous Flesh,' *Shelley: Modern Judgement*, ed. R. B. Woodings (London: Macmillan, 1968) 247-48. Ulmer's *Shelleyan Eros* similarly articulates Shelley's desire for Emily in a different and more rhetorical way: 'The poet's desire for Emily modulates from the Seraphic (l.21) to the bodily, from the supernal to the worldly, only because Shelleyan contraries imply one another from the start, so that the humanization of eros ironically leaves love more idealizing than ever.' William A. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 132.

poet's rapturous praise of Emily, in this manner, elevates her to the height of near deity:

'For in the fields of Immortality / My spirit should at first have worshipped thine, / A divine presence in a place divine' (133-35). Such a description likens her to the Uranian-Venus living with Adonis in their Elysian garden. In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley as the poet-speaker, rather than Adonis, is then equated to that Love which accompanies Emily as both the Uranian-Venus and Pandemian-Venus.

The poet continues to admire Emily using a variety of sensuous images Her beauty is '[k]illing the sense with passion' (85) and 'her mild lights' (87) are 'too deep / For the brief fathom-line of thought or sense' (89-90). In the poet's description, the Emily-like figure comes to be ornamented with light, odour, and flower:

Warm fragrance seems to fall from her light dress,  
And her loose hair; and where some heavy tress  
The air of her own speed has disentwined,  
The sweetness seems to satiate the faint wind;  
And in the soul a wild odour is felt,  
Beyond the sense, like fiery dews that melt  
Into the bosom of a frozen bud.— (105-111)

The 'fragrance' (105) is synaesthetically described to such an extent that the woman's 'light dress / And her loose hair' (105-06), and their associated 'sweetness' (108) even reach 'the soul [as] a wild odour' (109). The pleasure is depicted through an elegant simile of 'fiery dews that melt / Into the bosom of a frozen bud' (110-11). Here flowers and their odour intermingle with the feminine figure, like light spreading throughout

the world. The image of this feminine figure surrounded by fragrant air is re-imagined in the poem in a more intensified mode:

She met me, robed in such exceeding glory,  
That I beheld her not. In solitudes  
Her voice came to me through the whispering woods,  
And from the fountains, and the odours deep  
Of flowers, which, like lips murmuring in their sleep  
Of the sweet kisses which had lulled them there,  
Breathed but of *her* to the enamoured air;  
And from the breezes whether low or loud,  
And from the rain of every passing cloud,  
And from the singing of the summer-birds,  
And from all sounds, all silence. (199-209)<sup>34</sup>

Emily, infused with the ‘odours deep / Of flowers’ (202-03), both stimulates and fascinates the creative poet’s mind, which expresses itself in endlessly metamorphosing tropes of this link. Aside from the imagery of odour, the sequence of the poet’s encounter with an Emily-like ‘Being’ (190)—or ‘Her Spirit’ (216)—in his vision occasions a particular rhythm, a precise kind of music like a lullaby uttered from ‘lips murmuring in their sleep / Of the sweet kisses which had lulled them there’ (193-94). At the centre of such rhythmical ‘sounds’ (208), the ‘Spirit’ (216) of this feminine figure becomes ‘the harmony of truth’ (216).

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<sup>34</sup> This scene induced by the pleasant ‘odour’ (201) is already envisioned in *Alastor*, where the protagonist Poet is about to encounter a mysterious and idealised female figure:

Soft mossy lawns  
Beneath these canopies extend their swells,  
Fragrant with perfumed herbs, and eyed with blooms  
Minute yet beautiful. One darkest glen  
Sends from its woods of musk-rose, twined with jasmine,  
A soul-dissolving odour to invite  
To some more lovely mystery. (448-54)

The poet of *Epipsychidion* ornaments Emily's body with sensuous images of light, music, love, and odour, to ensure that the idealised Emily is metamorphosed through metaphorical association into the 'glorious One' (336):

Through the gray earth and branches bare and dead;  
So that her way was paved, and roofed above  
With flowers as soft as thoughts of budding love;  
And music from her respiration spread  
Like light,—all other sounds were penetrated  
By the small, still, sweet spirit of that sound,  
So that the savage winds hung mute around;  
And odours warm and fresh fell from her hair  
Dissolving the dull cold in the frore air:  
Soft as an Incarnation of the Sun,  
When light is changed to love, this glorious One  
Floated into the cavern where I lay,  
And called my Spirit, and the dreaming clay  
Was lifted by the thing that dreamed below  
As smoke by fire, and in her beauty's glow  
I stood, and felt the dawn of my long night  
Was penetrating me with living light:  
I knew it was the Vision veiled from me  
So many years—that it was Emily. (326-44)

Emily as 'the glorious One' (316) emerges as the Sun incarnate, bathed in 'planetary music' (86).<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, these lines from *Epipsychidion* reinforce the impression of odour by means of flower-images. Emily's way is embellished by 'flowers' (328), and these flowers are never ordinary ones, for they are 'as soft as thoughts of budding love' (328). That is to say, Shelley transforms the imagery of flowers into an emblem of

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<sup>35</sup> See also O'Malley, 102.

Emily's flourishing love. This flower-love combination is then transferred to the air or aura that Emily breathes, 'spread[ing] / Like light' (329-30) and 'music' (329), while 'odours warm and fresh fell from her hair / Dissolving the dull cold in the frore air' (334). Love emanating from Emily's body takes the form of a 'living light' (342) emanating from 'beauty's glow' (320). Emily as a representation of the Uranian-Venus figure, possesses the same quality as Asia in *Prometheus Unbound* when she is hailed as 'Life of Life' (II v 48).<sup>36</sup>

The blending of music (or melody) with flowers through sweetness is common in Shelley's later poems. Sometimes the images are intermingled with wine as in the lyric, 'Music' (1819), a cognate poem to 'Memory.' This poem opens with the speaker's desire for 'divine' music:

I pant for the music which is divine,  
     My heart in its thirst is a dying flower;  
 Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine,  
 [.....]  
 As the scent of a violet withered up,  
     Which grew by the brink of a silver lake,  
 When the hot noon has drained its dewy cup,  
     And ?[drink] there was none its thirst to slake—  
 And the violet lay dead whilst the odour flew  
 On the wings of the wind o'er the waters blue.  
 [.....]  
 As one who drinks from a charmed bowl

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<sup>36</sup>Grabo and Baker identify this incarnation of celestial beauty into 'the womanly form of Emilia' as a variation on 'the Uranian-Venus [in *Adonais*] or the Witch of 'The Witch of Atlas' or Asia of *Prometheus Unbound*—all personifications of the spirit of love and beauty in nature' (*Magic Plant* 338; Baker 219).

Of foaming and sparkling, and murmuring wine,  
 Whom a mighty enchantress filling up,  
 Transformed to love with her kiss divine—  
 [And the drink a spirit, which hears]  
 [I have drunken the spirit of music] (1-3, 14-19, 26-31)<sup>37</sup>

The imagery of ‘music’ (1), ‘a violet’ (13) and ‘wine’ (3) is organically interrelated through sweetness, especially the sweetness of their ‘scent’ (13) or aroma, which recalls the double meaning of the word *bouquet* as that can be applied to violets and wine. In *Epipsychidion*, Emily is depicted as a manifestation of the celestial and seraphic divinity. By contrast, the ‘mighty Enchantress’ (22) in this lyric charms those who savour her enchanted ‘wine’ (20) and ‘her kiss divine’ (22).<sup>38</sup> The sensual pleasure that the enchantress offers the seduced is attributed to a sensual *femme fatale*. The ‘foaming, and sparkling, and murmuring wine’ (20) aurally reproduce her seductive whispering in the ear—from her ‘charmèd cup’ (19)—and infuses her words with sensuality and sensuous appeal. This enchantress anticipates the ‘Shape all light’ (352), which, bearing ‘a crystal glass, / Mantling with bright Nepenthe’ (358-59), erases Rousseau’s memories in Shelley’s *The Triumph of Life*.<sup>39</sup>

This *femme fatale*, like the ‘Shape all light,’ also occurs in *Epipsychidion* in the poet’s autobiographical recollections. The poet-narrator relates that ‘She met me, robed in such exceeding glory’ (199). But, this female-figure also evokes another mysterious

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<sup>37</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Music,’ *POS*, 3: 239-41.

<sup>38</sup> See Irving Massey, ‘Shelley’s “Music, When Soft Voices Die”: Text and Meaning,’ *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 59.3 (1960): 430-38.

<sup>39</sup> See also ‘The Witch of Atlas’: ‘a strange panacea in a crystal bowl’ (594). For O’Malley, the synaesthetic combination of light and melody in ‘the Venus complex’ culminates in *The Triumph of Life*, especially the figure of a ‘Shape all light’ (80-83).

*femme fatale* figure identified as the ‘Spirit [...] clothed in no bright robes / Of shadowy silver or enshrining light’ in *Alastor* (479-81). The poet-narrator of *Epipsychidion* mistakes another figure, in a manner that recalls the Poet-figure in *Alastor*, to the ruination of his life:

There,—One, whose voice was venom’d melody  
 Sate by a well, under blue nightshade bowers:  
 The breath of her false mouth was like faint flowers,  
 Her touch was as electric poison,—flame  
 Out of her looks into my vitals came,  
 And from her living cheeks and bosom flew  
 A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew  
 Into the core of my green heart, and lay  
 Upon its leaves; until, as hair grown gray  
 O’er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime  
 With ruins of unseasonable time. (256-66)<sup>40</sup>

The figure has prompted speculation among commentators. A negative inversion of Emily represents a dangerous *femme fatale* who creates a ‘venom’d melody’ (256), fascinating all of his senses. The poet’s spiritual and emotional corruption or physical ruination is suggested by the bitter-sweetness of the ‘killing air’ (252) like ‘honey-dew’ (252). This sweet, dangerous, and ‘killing air’—another kind of odour—emanates from this feminine figure to corrupt the young poet’s physical and spiritual life. In this respect, it is natural to associate the ‘One’ as a mysterious feminine figure with the

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<sup>40</sup> Leighton also sees in this feminine figure an echo of the ‘Shape all light,’ who ‘violently tramples the mind’s thoughts “into the dust of death” ([*The Triumph of Life*] 388).’ Leighton regards the *femme fatale* of *Epipsychidion* as Emily’s ‘spectral double,’ ‘the dead thought behind the living one.’ Angela Leighton, ‘Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*,’ *The New Shelley*, Blank, 233-34.



Pandemian-Venus, who embodies 'Earthly Love' and 'Life (or imperfection).'<sup>41</sup> The image of the 'One' thus reveals both ideal and sensual sides of the same woman.

### **Venus and Lucifer: The Dual Aspect of the Planet**

This dual aspect of the Uranian and Pandemian Venuses is also depicted through Shelley's use of planetary imagery. The association of Emily with a planet is already alluded to in the title of the poem, *Epipsychidion*, because there is an analogy between *epipsyche* as 'a soul on a soul'—a variation on the concentric structure of 'a soul within the soul' (*Epipsychidion* 455)—and an '*epicycle*' as 'a circle upon a circle' and the motion of the planets in the Ptolemaic view of geocentrism.<sup>42</sup> The Ptolemaic geocentric system. The Ptolemaic *epicycle* is referred to in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Paradiso* 8.3) and *Convito* (2.3), from which Shelley quotes a line in his Advertisement, signalling Dante's strong influence on *Epipsychidion*.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, Emily is to Shelley as Beatrice was to Dante. As Carlos Baker points out, Dante's

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<sup>41</sup> See Newman Ivey White, *Shelley*, vol. 2 (London: Secker, 1947) 262. See also Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley* 288. In a letter, Shelley calls *Epipsychidion* 'an idealised history of my life and feelings' (2:434). While White supposes this feminine figure to be Harriet or Elizabeth Hitchener (Shelley 2:261), Walter Edwin Peck states that the portrayal of the 'One' is based on Shelley's first love, Harriet Grove or his first sexual experience with a prostitute, as well as venereal disease hinted by '[h]er touch [...] as electric poison' and 'flame / Out of her looks' (249-50). Walter Edwin Peck, *Shelley: His Life and Work*, vol. 1 (London: Earnest, 1927) 191. For the 'blighted poet' affected by venereal disease, Crook and Guiton (134-35). Unlike Walter Edwin Peck, White denies the allusion to venereal disease in these lines, insisting that such a disease is by no means suitable to the theme of *Epipsychidion* as 'a professed record of idealizations' (2: 607n24).

<sup>42</sup> See also C. D. Locock's account of 'epicycle.' C. D. Locock, Notes, *Epipsychidion, The Poems of Shelley*, By Percy Bysshe Shelley, vol. 2 (London: Methuen, 1911) 453.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Kay, 'Epicycle,' *The Dante Encyclopaedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (New York: Garland, 2000) 347-48; Richard E. Brown, 'The Role of Dante in *Epipsychidion*,' *Comparative Literature* 30.3 (1978): 223-35; and Earl Schulze, 'The Dantean Quest of *Epipsychidion*,' *Studies in Romanticism* 21 (1982): 191-216.

*Canzone* in *Convito* begins with an invocation to a 'supreme intelligence' which operates in the 'Third Heaven' or the sphere of Venus ('Shelley's Major Poetry' 226).<sup>44</sup> In *Epipsychidion*, Emily is also compared to 'a Splendour / Leaving the third sphere pilotless' (116-17).

The planet Venus, as an *epicycle* between the Earth and the Sun, is an important symbol in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*. Yeats's symbolist reading identifies a connection between Emily as the celestial Venus and the planet Venus as 'Hesperus' (222), which emerges in the poet's dream-vision:

Then, from the caverns of my dreamy youth  
I sprang, as one sandalled with plumes of fire,  
And towards the lodestar of my one desire,  
I flitted, like a dizzy moth, whose flight  
Is as a dead leaf's in the owlet light,  
When it would seek in Hesper's setting sphere  
A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre,  
As if it were a lamp of earthly flame.—  
But She, whom prayers or tears then could not tame,  
Past, like a God throned on a winged planet,  
Whose burning plumes to tenfold swiftness fan it,  
Into the dreary cone of our life's shade [...]. (217-28)<sup>45</sup>

The aspiring poet flees towards Polaris, his 'lodestar' (219), paralleling himself to 'a

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<sup>44</sup> See also Shelley's comments on Dante in *A Defence of Poetry*: 'His *Vita Nuova* is an inexhaustible fountain of purity of sentiment and language: it is the idealized history of that period, and those intervals of his life which were dedicated to love. His apotheosis of Beatrice in Paradise and the gradations of his own love and her loveliness, by which as by steps he feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme Cause, is the most glorious imagination of modern poetry' (*SPP* 525-26).

<sup>45</sup> See O'Malley, 101. For an account of this comet-image reflecting the poet's crisis in his life, see Frederick L. Hildebrand, 'Epipsychidion's Cosmic Collision: A Controlling Metaphor,' *Keats-Shelley Journal* 37 (1988): 77-80.

dizzy moth' (220) which 'seek[s] in Hesper's setting sphere / A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre' (222-23). 'Hesper's setting sphere' reinforces the gloomy mood of death and, simultaneously, the fading 'Hesper' signals an Emily (called 'She'), who flees swiftly from his eyes 'like a God throned on a winged planet' (226). In the sequence of these lines, the evanescent presence of Emily has a close affinity with Hesper disappearing as 'a God' on a 'winged planet' like a shooting star.

The poet, after this encounter, sets off to pursue and recuperate this *epipsyche*, a part of his own soul or what Shelley calls, in 'On Love,' an 'archetype.' The following lines intensify the poet's longing—almost to the point of desperate blind faith—to restore from 'Chaos' (242) the presence of Emily as the Uranian-Venus, whom he worships. The poet finds himself astray in 'the wintry forest of our life' (249), recalling the opening of Dante's *Inferno*. Vacillating between 'hope and fear' (246), the poet seeks out his Uranian-Venus, a 'veiled Divinity' (244), who illuminates and saves him from endless and 'vain strife' (250): 'I past, / Seeking among those untaught foresters / If I could find one form resembling hers, / In which she might have masked herself from me' (251-55).

The poet's contradictory impulses between 'hope' and 'fear' are also expressed in terms of planetary imagery. The poet's pursuit of the sacred Emily in the form of the Uranian-Venus is transfigured into 'the Sun' (280, 335, 375) alongside Mary as 'the Moon' (279) and Claire Clairmont as 'the Comet' (368).<sup>46</sup> Yet, eventually, Emily as

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<sup>46</sup> Yeats also discusses the image of the Moon as Mary with reference to Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* (Yeats 91-93). For another symbolic reading of the planets and stars in *Epipsychidion*,

‘the Sun’ finds a metaphorical connection with Venus as Hesperus, where Life and death co-exist:

Thou too, O Comet beautiful and fierce,  
Who drew the heart of this frail Universe  
Towards thine own; till wreckt in that convulsion,  
Alternating attraction and repulsion,  
Thine went astray and that was rent in twain;  
Oh, float into our azure heaven again!  
Be there love’s folding-star at thy return;  
The living Sun will feed thee from its urn  
Of golden fire; the Moon will veil her horn  
In thy last smiles; adoring Even and Morn  
Will worship thee with incense of calm breath  
And lights and shadows; as the star of Death  
And Birth is worshipped by those sisters wild  
Called Hope and Fear—[...]. (368-81)

In this depiction of the ‘Comet beautiful and fierce’ (368), the word ‘heart’ (369) signifies both the centre of the ‘frail Universe’ (369) and the human heart convulsing with the ‘attraction and repulsion’ of the nerves. This analogy of the ‘Comet’ to the psycho-physiological condition is effectively extended to further illuminate Shelley’s display of complex feelings towards Claire, Mary, and Emily. Yet, the imagery of stars is even more revealing about Emily. Both the ‘Sun’ and ‘Moon’ is put aside to foreground not only the image of ‘Comet,’ but also the planet Venus, which is called ‘love’s folding-star’ (374), a phrase also used in *Hellas* as ‘Love’s folding star’

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see also Kenneth Neill Cameron, ‘The Planet-Tempest Passage in *Epipsychidion*,’ *PMLA* 63.3 (1948): 950-72; and Stuart M. Sperry, *Shelley’s Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 171-75.

(1029).<sup>47</sup> Venus, in this passage, emerges as ‘the star of Death / And Birth’ (379-80), that is to say, ‘Even and Morn’ (377), echoing her ‘[a]lternating attraction and repulsion’ (371). This Venus invariably entails two allegorical worshippers, ‘Hope and Fear’ (381), just as the youthful poet ‘went forth, with hope and fear’ (246), wherein fear signifies Pandemia and Urania symbolises hope. Venus is, as Shelley writes in the ‘Ode to the West Wind,’ both ‘Destroyer and Preserver.’

Emily anticipates the positive side of the ‘Shape all light’ as her light and love spread, albeit violently, around the world:

The hour is come:—the destined Star has risen  
Which shall descend upon a vacant prison.  
The walls are high, the gates are strong, thick set  
The sentinels—but true Love never yet  
Was thus constrained: it overleaps all fence:  
Like lightning, with invisible violence  
Piercing its continents; like Heaven’s free breath,  
Which he who grasps can hold not; liker Death,  
Who rides upon a thought, and makes his way  
Through temple, tower, and palace, and the array  
Of arms: more strength has Love than he or they;  
For it can burst his charnel, and make free  
The limbs in chains, the heart in agony,  
The soul in dust and chaos. (394-407)

Emily in the form of ‘the destined Star’ (394) and ‘true Love’ (397) breaks the bonds of

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<sup>47</sup> This image of Venus, alternating between death and life, is also found in *Hellas*: ‘Hesperus flies from awakening night / And pants in its beauty and seed with light / Fast flashing, soft and bright’ (*Hellas* 1038-40). For the motif of Eros and Psyche in the age of Romanticism, see Jean H. Hagstrum, *Eros and Vision: The Restoration to Romanticism* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1989) 71-92.

her incarceration, ‘with invisible violence / Piercing its continents’ (399-400). This oxymoronic relationship between ‘Love’ and ‘violence’ conveys the essence of these dual Venuses which are manifest in Emily.<sup>48</sup> The ‘Love’ in Emily is even superior to the power of ‘Death’ and all its military force. As in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (116), ‘Love’ relaxes the heart and loosens the limbs, whereby its harmonising and soothing force exterminates ‘agony’ (406), ‘dust and chaos’ (407).<sup>49</sup> The word ‘Lucifer’ also connects Emily to Venus by offering a glimpse of the destructive force present in the figure of Venus. The fact that ‘Lucifer,’ etymologically, means ‘light-bringer’ resonates with Shelley’s ‘Shape all light,’ because the word ‘Lucifer’ also suggests a destructive force. Bringing light always implies its extinction, since the word ‘Lucifer’ invokes Milton’s fallen angel, Satan, who, in *Paradise Lost*, ‘in contempt / At one slight bound high overleap’d all bound’ (IV 180-81).<sup>50</sup> Moreover, in Book II of *Paradise Lost*, Satan fights and overcomes ‘Death’ at the gate of Hell before journeying through ‘Chaos.’ This image of overleaping also corresponds to the ‘true Love’ flying up ‘[l]ike lightening, with invisible violence’ and the island, where the poet desires to retreat with

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<sup>48</sup> It is curious to compare this point with McDayter’s Lacanian reading of *Epipsychidion*, borrowing Slavoj Žižek’s Lacanian notion that “‘the *Object of desire itself coincides with the force that prevents its attainment.*’” (McDayter 45). McDayter claims that ‘[i]t is the moment in which subjectivity is dissolved in the “intermixture” of beings, but it is also the moment of castration when the poet is brought back to “me,” to desire, and to language’ (McDayter 44).

<sup>49</sup> ‘Eros, who is the most beautiful among the immortal gods, the limb-melter—he overpowers the mind and the thoughtful counsel of all the gods and of all human beings in their breasts.’ Hesiod, *Theogony, Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006) 13. For an effect of love’s relaxing effect in aesthetic terms, see also Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry*: ‘as a beautiful object presented to the sense, by causing a relaxation in the body, produces the passion of love in the mind; so if by any means the passion should first have its origin in the mind, a relaxation of the outward organs will as certainly ensue in a degree proportioned to the cause’ (136).

<sup>50</sup> Carlos Baker, ‘A Note on Shelley and Milton,’ *Modern Language Notes* 55.8(1940):585; Frederick L. Jones, ‘Shelley and Milton,’ *Studies in Philology* 49.3 (1952): 512.

Emily, is 'Bright as that wandering Eden Lucifer' (459).<sup>51</sup>

This imagery of 'Lucifer' and Shelley's Miltonic allusions play a critical part in the final movement of *Epipsychidion*. In fact, the poet identifies himself with the image of Satan as an iconoclastic anti-hero, who becomes, in McDayter's reading of this passage, a symbol of *jouissance* through his endless 'fall.'<sup>52</sup> More importantly, Shelley's Miltonic allusion relates to the dual aspect of 'Hesper' ('Even') and 'Lucifer' ('Morn') which, in turn, corresponds with the female soul and male soul unified in one soul as *epipsyche*.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, the rebellious character of 'Lucifer' takes on the character of Prometheus, when he is re-united with Asia, a figure anticipated by as an embodiment of 'love of light.'<sup>54</sup>

Unlike Prometheus and Asia, the poet of *Epipsychidion* never reaches Emily. The poet, similar to Lucifer, is forbidden to enter paradise and speak to Emily. Instead, the perfected ideal beauty of Emily leaves only a trace of light and odour, which is as evanescent and elusive as music. The poet can only dream of their new future abode abundant with rich and mellow fragrance:

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<sup>51</sup> This place echoes the garden of Adonis (O'Malley 111). The poet's ideal place where he imagines accompanying Emily is, as Joseph Barrell says, 'pervaded by the essential unity of things. In the island every motion, odor, beam, and tone is in unison with the deep music that is the soul within a soul' (Barrell 168).

<sup>52</sup> McDayter claims that 'the fantasy that drives this poem need not be read as the fulfillment of a desire lost, but the repetition of the loss that opens up the space *for* desire—the satanic "leap" into a paradise that can never be regained but is endlessly enjoyed in the repetition of the fall.' (McDayter 45). Indeed, Lacanian terminology such as '*jouissance*,' '*objet a*,' and 'the Symbolic Order,' has been employed to explicate Shelley's hidden desire directed towards the figure of Emily. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, 'Keeping faith with Desire: A Reading of *Epipsychidion*,' Clark and Hogle, 180-96; Samuel Lyndon Gladden, *Shelley's Textual Seductions: Plotting Utopia in the Erotic and Political Work* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 173-224.

<sup>53</sup> See O'Malley, 64-65.

<sup>54</sup> Compare Shelley's account of Prometheus and Satan in *Prometheus Unbound* (Preface 206-07).

And all the place is peopled with sweet airs;  
 The light clear element which the isle wears  
 Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,  
 Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,  
 And falls upon the eye-lids like faint sleep;  
 And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,  
 And dart their arrowy odour through the brain  
 'Till you might faint with that delicious pain.  
 And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,  
 With that deep music is in unison:  
 Which is a soul within the soul—they seem  
 Like echoes of an antenatal dream.— (445-56)

The 'isle' (444) is wrapped in 'sweet airs' (445) from 'the scent of lemon-flowers' (447) and 'moss violets and jonquils' (450). The 'odour' (453) conveys the sensation of 'that delicious pain' (452) and the synaesthetic pleasure of 'odour, beam, and tone' (453) renders it a 'delicious isle' (478). Such a sensuous and tranquil mood engenders a synaesthesia in which 'every motion, odour, beam, and tone, / With that deep music is in unison' (453-54). This description of the isle, where the souls of the poet and Emily might be united, alludes to the scene from Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, in which Satan first spies on Eve, adorned with various beautiful and fragrant flowers, walking in paradise where he tempts her to eat the forbidden fruit (IX 424-732). Here the relationship between the poet and Emily bears a close representation to that between Satan and Eve. As 'jonquils,' symbolically, means that 'love is returned,' the poet hopes to retrieve 'a soul within the soul' (455) from the 'antenatal' (456) state. In other words, this 'isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea, / Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity'



(457-58), symbolises a kind of 'antenatal' world which is to be realised at some point in the future. The fragrant 'airs' of plants also work effectively to increase the fantastic or visionary atmosphere of the isle surrounded by 'the Golden Eastern air' (516), where 'true taste / Hires not the pale drudge Luxury' (525). The image of Venus as both goddess and planet are integrated into the Shelley's account of the isle as the ideal planet or utopian state. The isle draws together the contradictory and dual aspects of *Epipsychidion* as represented by the two types of Venus, as it reconciles the two paradoxical words (worlds) of 'Lucifer' and 'Eden,' where sensuous 'odour, beam, and tone' beckon the poet.

### **3. The Pursuit of the Eternal and the Poetics of Sensibility: A Coda**

The poet's imagery of flowers depicted in the scenery of the 'Eden Lucifer' isle, increasingly projects the poet-narrator's longing for an idealised but unreachable Emily. For example, the '[p]arasite flowers' (502) grow in the 'Eden Lucifer' and the 'ring-dove, in the embowering ivy, yet / Keeps up her love-lament' (529-30).<sup>55</sup> This image of 'ivy' appears twice (442, 500), and relates, by implication, to the poet's desire to embrace Emily just as ivy clings to other plants. Simultaneously, Shelley's use of this flower imagery relates to the 'love-lament' of the 'ring-dove' which, symbolic of that unforgettable lost-love, mirrors the frustration of the poet's love for Emily and his unfulfilled desire to 'become [...] inseparable, one' (538, 540). The poet's desire to

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<sup>55</sup> In his essay 'The Critic as Host,' J. Hillis Miller explains his own understanding of 'deconstruction' with reference to the concept of 'the parasite.' (217-26).

unite with Emily explains his insistence on repeating the word 'one' (549-91). The poet's heart is entirely 'possessed' (549) and 'intermix[ed]' (565) with the 'one' (552) that is Emily, as his 'Passion' (571) for her prompts the dream that they might become 'one / Spirit within two frames' (574). This aspiration also chimes with Shelley's use of the parasite ivy imagery. Consequently, frustrated physical and spiritual desire bursts out, almost psychosomatically:

One hope within two wills, one will beneath  
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,  
One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,  
And one annihilation. Woe is me!  
The winged words on which my soul would pierce  
Into the height of Love's rare Universe,  
Are chains of lead around its flight of fire—  
I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire! (584-91)

In spite of the poet's original empathy with Emily, this passage, by contrast to the harmonising vibration of the two souls in 'On Love,' shows both positive and negative or creative and destructive elements—'one life, one death, / One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality, / And one annihilation' (585-87). This destructive element is especially present in the poet's 'flight[s] of fire' (598), which rise up to 'the height of Love's rare Universe only to 'sink' and 'expire' (591). The poet's flight of imagination ends in a tragic fall reminiscent of Icarus, or rather Lucifer. The poet craves for 'one life, [and] one death' (585) of attaining his longing for 'Love' and dramatically proclaims: 'Woe is me!'(587).

This internal 'flame' both destructively burns the poet and provides him with some

masochistic pleasure in the ‘delicious pain’ of his ‘annihilation.’<sup>56</sup> The poet recognises the impossibility of his idealised figure of Love and then sends to Emily his own ‘[w]eak Verses’ (592): ‘Love’s very pain is sweet, / But its reward is in the world divine / Which, if not here, it builds beyond the grave’ (596-98). The poet-narrator relishes the ‘delicious pain’ of love, recalling Juliet’s ‘Parting is such sweet sorrow’ (II i 230).<sup>57</sup> In this bitter-sweetness we may detect aspects of the Eros-Thanatos relationship.<sup>58</sup> More significantly, the poet’s ‘Verses’ expose the poet’s own unrequited obsession in this final section (593-604), which are no longer confined to the figure of Emily, but

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<sup>56</sup> Miller remarks about the climax of *Epipsychidion*: ‘the passage [483-512] is one of Shelley’s grandest symphonic climaxes, but what I express is the failure of poetry and the failure of love. It expresses the destruction of the poet-lover in his attempt to escape his boundaries, the chains at once of selfhood and of language.’ (‘The Critic as Host’ 243). For another variation on this reading of *Epipsychidion*, see also J. Hillis Miller, *The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985) 114-79. Deconstructive readings of *Epipsychidion* may be traced back to Harold Bloom’s remark: ‘The poem [*Epipsychidion*] violently alternates between the quest for relationship and the quest for destruction, a sweet, mystical annihilation. These two quests are antithetical: the first is rational and poetic; the second is less than rational and attempts to destroy the poem’ (*Shelley’s Mythmaking* 211). Bloom thus unmasks the unifying and destructive elements in the two antithetical forces at work in Shelley’s poetic language. In similar vein, D. J. Hughes also comments that ‘annihilation’ or destructive elements in *Epipsychidion* is ‘neither a self pitying cry nor a confession of poetic failure, but the necessary completion of the Shelleyan form.’ D. J. Hughes, ‘Coherence and Collapse in Shelley, with Particular Reference to *Epipsychidion*,’ *ELH* 28. 3 (1961): 278. Sperry, whose approach is closer to Wasserman rather than the so-called deconstructionists, also comes to a similar conclusion to them: ‘the perpetuation of the sexual metaphor in the final line, the last in the poem proper, suggests that ecstasy can be achieved only at the cost of ultimate dissemination and collapse’ whereby ‘[t]he rhetorical breakdown is symptomatic of the poem’s alternating construction and deconstruction’ (*Shelley’s Major Verse* 180). Yet, during the last twenty years, the critical focus on *Epipsychidion* has gradually shifted from deconstructive and linguistic aspects to aspects of sexuality or psychoanalysis which share a similar linguistic focus to certain deconstructive readings. William A. Ulmer’s *Shelleyan Eros* is remarkably poised between these two critical movements. Thomas Pfau’s reading of *Epipsychidion* should be placed in this tradition. Thomas Pfau, ‘Tropes of Desire: Figuring the Insufficient Void of Self-Consciousness in Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*,’ *Keats-Shelley Journal* 40 (1991): 99-126.

<sup>57</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Jill L. Levenson (2000; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 219.

<sup>58</sup> Some scholars point out the presence of the binary opposition between life as *Eros* and death as *Thanatos* (collapse) in *Epipsychidion*. ‘In Shelley’s poetry the repetition crucial to metaphor, which replicates tenor in vehicle and figure in referent, often activates the compulsive repetitions of *Thanatos*. In its nostalgia for identities prior to differentiation, Shelley’s metaphorical idealism will finally accept death as the negative form (specular image) of erotic transcendence’ (Ulmer 10).

encompass the poet-narrator's own poetic endeavour and shortcomings. As a matter of fact, Shelley became disillusioned with Emilia Viviani, describing her as 'a cloud instead of Juno; and poor Ixion starts from the centaur that was the offspring of his own embrace' (*LPBS* 2: 434).<sup>59</sup>

Interestingly, the evasive image of 'a cloud' for Emily is revealing in another way, as it seems to be Shelley himself, who avoids reaching his idealised Emily, precisely because, if his poetic language catches her, then his language confines Emily, who is currently locked in a cell, into another enclosed place, what he calls 'the delicious isle' (478) and 'a pleasure house' (491). In other words, the tropes of this beautiful island 'for delight' (487) that Shelley offers to Emily, ironically, reveal it as a 'prison-house of language,' by confining Emily, a 'lady of the solitude' (516), into the recurrent image of a 'tower' (403, 486, 531). Instead, towards the end of Shelley's poem, the real figure of Emily is increasingly transfigured into something like an essence of poetry.<sup>60</sup> The poet-narrator's idealised 'image of some bright Eternity' (115) is an avatar of his own figure of ideal beauty in poetry rather than the historical reality of a pitiful girl imprisoned in her cell.<sup>61</sup>

Such a poetic aspiration also echoes Shelley's endless pursuit of idealised desire,

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<sup>59</sup> Shelley's disillusionment may result from his financial dealings with Emily. Michael O'Neill *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) 139.

<sup>60</sup> In this sense, I disagree with Gelpi's 'caveat against androgyny as historically misogynist' in 'its ambition' to evade 'relationships with actual women by subsuming "the feminine" into the subjectivity of the male' and her repudiation of Shelley's 'desire for unity of being that denigrates and seeks to escape the actualities of human dependence and interdependence' (Gelpi *Shelley's Goddess* ix).

<sup>61</sup> David Perkins regards 'Emily as a moral incarnation of Intellectual Beauty.' David Perkins, *The Quest for Permanence* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1959) 173.

the eternal longing for the 'intense inane' as described in *Prometheus Unbound* (III iv 204).<sup>62</sup> Yet Shelley's poetic figure of Emily still retains a tangible quality in her intangible presence. Shelley defines poetry and beauty in *A Defence of Poetry*:

Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge. [...] It is the perfect and consummate surface and bloom of things; it is as the odour and the colour of the rose to the texture of the elements which compose it; as the form and splendour of unfaded beauty to the secrets of anatomy and corruption. (*SPP* 531)

The 'odour and the colour' of 'the rose' in this passage can be substituted for the representation of the figure of Emily filled with odour and light. Emily as idealised female form is identified with 'the form and splendour of unfaded beauty.' The ideal Emily is an example of Shelley's metamorphoses of 'something divine' or 'unfaded beauty'—like the 'Spirit' in *Alastor*, the Spirit of Beauty in the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,' 'the witch Poesy' in 'Mont Blanc,' the Lady of the garden in 'The Sensitive Plant,' the protagonist-witch in 'The Witch of Atlas,' and 'the Shape all light' in *The Triumph of Life*. All of these elusive representations are often emphasised by their super-sensible status. For example, Shelley's Spirit of Beauty in the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and the essence of the skylark in 'To a Sky-Lark' (1820), are entities beyond the naked eye or any other optical tools. Yet Shelley's description of ideal Beauty always entails sensuous pleasure. In the case of *Epipsychidion*, the idealised Emily as Venus leaves a sweet scent as a trace of some transcendental realm, 'the height of Love's rare Universe' (589), which the poet-narrator's imagination

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<sup>62</sup> For Shelley's impulse directed towards the transcendent world, see also Perkins, *The Quest for Permanence* 137-69.

eternally aspires towards. In this sense, scent is especially appropriate to the idealised Emily because it is in between the tangible and intangible, as it cannot be touched, but can still be sensually apprehended, by reinforcing Emily's dual status, the celestial (intangible) and earthly (tangible) at once.

Shelley's poetics of sensibility is a manifestation of his longing to capture his 'unfaded beauty,' that is, to crystallise his ideal of beauty and love in the present moment of sensuous experience. *A Defence of Poetry* illustrates that the poet 'not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the forms of the flower and the fruit of latest time' (*SPP* 513). For Shelley, the ideal and 'unfaded beauty' of *Epipsychidion* resides only within his own poetic imagining 'now here.' This moment comes to be realised no longer in the far future or far past, but in 'the future in the present,' the moment of which is captured and perpetuated by virtue of the vivid and sensuous imagery that expresses the pleasure of the senses in aesthetic experience, defined as 'the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds' (*SPP* 532). Therefore, Shelley's art of sensation must content itself with the pleasures of the senses and the imagination's ability to realise the present moment in all of its sensuous and sensual reality. This is epitomised in a letter to John Gisborne written just a month before Shelley drowned in Lerici (18 June 1822): 'if the past and future could be obliterated, the present would content me so well that I could say with Faust to the passing moment, 'Remain, thou,

thou art so beautiful [*Faust* Part I 1700]' (*LPBS* 2: 435-36).

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